

thought that is complex, and rhythm that is crafted—it flattens them all” (80). But she does not assume that there can be anything like pure equivalence unless pure equivalence is characterized by beautiful errors and unintended resonances. Many Modernist translators, including Pound, argued against traditional requirements for translation such as fluency in the source language and scholarly knowledge of the source culture. For the most part, Caws avoids the difficult questions about negotiating cultural difference that are invited by these Modernist theories of translation. Broaching these questions, so central in much recent scholarship on translation, might have been fruitful.

As Caws discusses her reworking of Charles Mauron’s translations of Mallarmé, she reflects on the travail of translation: “It is solitude itself, working late in an empty study with some yet other *nil* and nil and nothing staring at you from every mirroring wall with nary anybody to accompany your very uncertain vigil over what turns out to be, every time at its best, *rien*” (55). Yet it is precisely the difficulties and moments of despair that lend authority to her fundamental optimism about the enterprise of translation. Given the increasingly global predominance of English, her passion and optimism reflect a kind of literary heroism. Caws’s engaging writing and vast experience make *Surprised in Translation* a valuable addition to the library of anyone interested in the practice of translation.

EMILY O. WITTMAN

*The University of Alabama*

ROMANTIC THEORY: FORMS OF REFLEXIVITY IN THE ROMANTIC ERA. By Leon Chai. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. xx, 283 p.

Leon Chai’s fine new study opens with a meditation on the “fate of theory,” a discourse that seems to have languished since the early 1990s and now appears beset by chronic fatigue and epigonal tendencies. As he surmises, this may be the case because “our present forms of theory simply don’t answer the questions we really want to ask” (vii). In particular Foucault’s *Order of Things*, that “last attempt . . . at universal theory,” appears to have won a Pyrrhic victory on behalf of theory. For, as Chai notes, its underlying paradigm of the episteme implied a wholly synchronous relationship between knowledge and representation, but by postulating a static and absolute “correspondence between ontology and representation” Foucault appeared to beg the question of theory on a grand scale. In other words, his account “assumed exactly what you had to prove, that the world out there looks the way you represent it to be” (viii). By contrast, Chai’s more Hegelian approach holds that the study of theory ought to be interwoven with the historical shifts and transformations of those questions to which theory responds. As he argues, it is that very insight that accounts for the unique profile of Romantic theory, in particular its meta-discursive and reflexive relationship with its “objects,” which are viewed as extensions of its own cryptic motives. Responding to the apparent circularity and failure of structuralism, the study of Romantic theory, Chai argues, is at once archeological and remedial—exploring unique possibilities then in existence for the practice of theory and offering us a possible way out of the apparent malaise of critical theory today. For us to grasp why “theory at the present time isn’t necessarily all it wants to be” we need to “go back to the source or sources of modern theory” (viii-ix).

For Chai, it is in Romanticism that the project, the stakes, and the underlying motives of a theoretical take on the world are being explored. More insistently and profoundly than at any time before or since, theory during the Romantic period “had become aware of its power to conceptualize any and all material circumstances” and “possessed a virtually limitless capacity to conceptualize” (xi). As it ruminates its own underlying motives more than its instrumental possibilities, Romantic theory reveals its underlying ontology. Such bracketing of instrumental reason or, perhaps, its conversion from an accepted framework for rational practice into a distinctly problematic “object” warranting intense scrutiny marks, of course, the transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism. In that sense, Chai seems justified in generalizing that “Romantic theory is always “more than just knowledge or explanation” and “never just a heuristic framework for a given field” (xii). For the Romantics (with some notable exceptions), theory constituted an underlying vocation of sorts, a pursuit more intuitive than propositional that tempted otherwise pragmatic, sober, highly literate individuals to enter uncharted and potentially treacherous speculative terrain. Reminiscent of Keats’s Knight at Arms, the Romantic theorist’s quintessential habitus is to “loiter” in the realm of the virtual, textual, and speculative, and (again resembling the hero of Keats’s equivocal ballad) to disconcert his more pedestrian and pragmatic contemporaries with the apparent inconclusiveness of his pursuits. For Romantic theory does not involve itself in the abstract realm of modern instrumental and bureaucratic rationality, and it is even less at home in the three-dimensional, physical space of Aristotelian *praxis*. Instead, its domain is the virtual reality of thought as it explores its own labyrinthine, baroque structure by means of a new, insistently speculative questioning.

Simply put, then, all Romantic theory reveals a strong meta-theoretical (or reflexive) bent that typically supplants its field- or discipline-specific concerns and questions. As Chai puts it, for the Romantics, “the reasons we do theory the way we do come less from our knowledge of a given field than from what we intuitively feel about theory itself” (xii). With the notion of instrumental reason and Cartesian method having become “objects” of reflection—much in the Hegelian sense—Romantic theory looks on modernity askance, musing on its unspoken, unconscious, and potentially disastrous commitments and pursuits: “Theory grew out of a deeper necessity than any described by our efforts to specify what was rational. The role of theory was to find out what the sources of that necessity were” (xiii). To illustrate the validity of its thesis, *Romantic Theory* ranges widely, far more so than virtually any other recent work on that topic. The scope of Chai’s book is itself a welcome feature in that it helps rescue the study of Romanticism from a still lingering balkanization first wrought by the curricular and aesthetic orthodoxies of the later nineteenth century.

Following an opening discussion of the theoretical stakes encrypted in Rousseau’s and Shelley’s concept of emotion, *Romantic Theory* takes up the recovery of Homeric and classical Greek culture in Wolf’s *Prolegomena to Homer* (1795) and, briefly, in texts by Schiller and Schlegel. From here, we are ushered on to the battlefield at Jena, in what is a particularly daring attempt to work out a complex analogy between Napoleon’s uniquely modern approach to warfare and Hegel’s equally ground-breaking transformation of theory. Next is a chapter on Xavier Bichat and his momentous exploration of human tissue and medical reform, followed by an account of Humphrey Davy’s 1801 lectures on chemistry, and a particularly strenuous chapter on mathematical theory (Évariste Galois on the solvability of equations by radicals). From these more technical exploits in Romantic science, which nonetheless sustain the book’s focus on the discovery and development of Romantic theory as an endeavor in non-instrumental thinking, we return to more familiar terrain: Coleridge, Mary Shelley, and Hölderlin. Perhaps anxious that such an all-you-can-eat approach to the opulent theoretical offerings of Romanticism might prove too heavy a diet even for an academic audience, Chai opens each of his chapters with a vivid description of the

place and scene of theoretical inquiry. These vignettes range from the small Île des Peupliers, burial site of Rousseau until 1794, to a dawn in the Gentilly district of Paris, scene of Évariste Galois's death by duel in 1832; from the unfolding battle at Jena on October 14, 1806, to a detailed sketch of the Hôtel-Dieu in Lyon where, beginning with the abolition of all university faculties and medical schools in 1792, the suddenly deregulated field of medicine created unexpected professional opportunities for the young Xavier Bichat. Remarkably, Chai's central argument does not get lost in too many details, and his book proves to be both engaging and instructive throughout.

Opening his discussion of the later eighteenth century's concept of emotion in Rousseau, Chai observes that "sensibility involves not only emotion but awareness or sensitivity as well. But to what? Since sensibility itself consists of a capacity to feel, the highest form of awareness must be the ability to detect the same capacity in others" (1). In Rousseau's *Julie*, the true locus of emotion is found not in its consummation but in the heightened self-awareness to which it gives rise. Thus Julie's "real source of pleasure isn't merely an image of St. Preux but the act by which she surrenders herself to it" (3). Fast-forwarding to Shelley's "The Triumph of Life," Chai offers a reading in which Shelley exfoliates the theoretical complexities of Rousseauvian sensibility. In casting the ostensibly inward struggle of emotion in the social medium of words, Rousseau is seen by Shelley as proffering a theory of emotion as contagion. With words functioning as "seeds" for a potentially illimitable process of transference, Rousseau's readers take on the burden of passions that have been stripped of their original object. What they now "crave is merely a pretext for their own emotion. As they yield to passion, they discover what it's like to feel passion for its own sake rather than for a particular individual or object" (11). Here, as Chai's reading of "The Triumph of Life" convincingly shows, Shelley demurs, since "emotion for its own sake precludes the possibility of any relation to others" (11). Shelley's own emphatically speculative response to this dilemma is to sharpen the focus on the medium of representation. Following de Man's lead, Chai emphasizes the prominent role of allegory throughout "The Triumph of Life." The effect of a language whose "focus is on . . . imagery itself" is to deny the illusion of reference and, hence, to thwart emotion as it seeks to visit its energies (be it experientially or transferentially) on the "object" of desire. By confounding the naturalist (specular) fallacy of language as representation and reference, Shelleyan allegory "opens a perspective that's aware of itself as perspective. Which is to say: theory" (14).

Focused on the writings of Wolf, Schlegel, and Schiller, Chai's discussion of the status of classical antiquity in nineteenth-century thought emphasizes the increasingly self-conscious or reflexive nature of what, even in late Roman antiquity, had always been an inherently nostalgic outlook. Wolf's *Prolegomena to Homer* not only acknowledges the Homeric Ur-text to be irretrievable, but also premises the disciplinary and institutional mission of classical philology on that very fact. Given that the oral and performative event of Homeric chant is obviously irretrievable per se, the task of philology becomes meta-discursive in kind; that is, it sets out to chronicle "the attempts at recovery. For Wolf, what each period brought to its editorial work was its own form of nostalgia for the past" (27). Friedrich Schlegel's nearly contemporaneous essay "Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie" (1795-1797) places an even stronger emphasis on modernity's irremediable estrangement from its classical "sources." Here, as elsewhere, Chai's account is succinct, perceptive, and compelling. If one feels nonetheless dissatisfied, it is most likely because virtually every chapter in *Romantic Theory* takes on what would properly be the subject for an entire book. In the present instance, Chai's thesis about Romantic theory's identifying classical antiquity as the ultimate object manqué would have benefited from a larger supporting cast of voices. What of the entire second generation of Romantics, Idealists, and philologists (Creuzer, Hegel, Bopp, Heine, Börne, Keats, Byron) who, far more than Wolf, pinpoint for us the necessarily reflexive and ironic intellectual figurations wherein a damaged modernity relates to its elusive (or merely supposed?) classical sources?

In particular, Chai's brief but lucid detour through Schiller's *Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* alerts us to the monumental presence altogether unacknowledged in this discussion—Goethe. While the reason for excluding Goethe from this argument is obvious enough (the “great pagan” invariably threatens to overwhelm any other voice and focus one might wish to establish), it is nonetheless surprising not to find a single reference to his relevant and crucial writings on the relation of modernity to antiquity. To be sure, Goethe's commitment to a “tender empiricism” rather than to the vagaries of Romantic and Idealist speculation render him an unlikely voice in a conventional study of Romantic theory. Yet given Chai's inclination to locate theoretical arguments even where the overt discourse is emphatically averse to speculation, Goethe would make for a fascinating example of the “theorist in spite of himself”—particularly in a discussion of his classicism. Chai notes that “Greek subjectivity in Schlegel is, in effect, purely a creation of theory . . . [and] has less to do with his knowledge of Greek subjectivity than it does with his reflection on classical scholarship” (50). Here, then, the question to ask is whether this fundamentally ironic insight is best realized as *theory* or whether a non-discursive kind of writing (such as the mordant irony of Goethe's *Römische Elegien* or the hybridization of poetry and philosophy in Heine's oeuvre) might offer the *mot juste* for a modernity beginning to recognize how decisively it has become estranged from its sources.

Chai's discussion of Napoleon and Hegel, while vivid and technically accurate on aspects of warfare and speculative dialectics alike, ultimately does not break significant new ground. To be sure, when *representing* his military tactics and methods to an enthralled European public, Napoleon Bonaparte was certainly given to statements no less grandiose than his actual geo-political ambitions. Still, there is good reason to doubt (as students of Bonaparte from Tolstoy onward have repeatedly done) that the tactics employed in his campaigns were adhered to with rigor and precision. His callous statement that, unlike the Emperor of Austria, he could afford to “spend” a few thousand soldiers each month (and his implicit confidence in his charisma as a leader and recruiter of new troops) probably had a lot more to do with his initial successes than the tactics and battle orders that he so magniloquently announced to an enthralled public. Consequently, the trope of “return” that Chai mobilizes to connect the fleetingly intersecting careers of Napoleon and Hegel seems to bear more weight than it is fit to support. If the discussion of Napoleon is ultimately little more than a vivid conceit, however, Hegel is clearly the most exemplary figure for the kind of argument Chai is making about Romantic theory. In stark contrast to Foucault's paradigm of theory, where all is static and synchronous, Hegel's theory is emphatically organic and developmental, a point explored with much finesse in Chai's study (70–87). While it may not add much to recent and far more detailed accounts by Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, Chai's reading of the *Phenomenology*—so obviously the very embodiment of Romantic theory as a reflexive, meta-critical enterprise—nonetheless offers an account of that vexing book at once sophisticated and readable; typically, in the long history of Hegel criticism only one of these epithets applies.

On the face of it, the subject of Chai's next chapter, Xavier Bichat, would appear to be the anti-theorist par excellence. Committed to replacing theory with “a practice dominated by observation without any trace of the speculative” (95), Bichat's physiology is driven by his quest for “an explanatory principle” of absolute specificity. In so doing, however, Bichat comes up against the paradox previously encountered by Stoic physics, medieval nominalism, and eighteenth-century empiricism. For it soon turns out that for any particular to properly function as a *principle* within a larger explanatory account, some essence has to be posited even in the domain of physiology. Like Hegel, in his account of “sense-certainty” and “perception” at the beginning of the *Phenomenology*, Bichat is forced to concede that, while the idea of matter devoid of properties may well be thinkable, we could never achieve a perceptual and cognitive rapport with it. Hence “what is at stake for Bichat in the discussion of properties is the role of observation in the formation

of theory" (97). His goal is to formulate a theory that is not speculative but at all times driven and circumscribed by what can be observed. Bichat's major contribution to the history of medicine—his account of organic tissue—offers a *reductio ad absurdum* of the nominalist/empiricist creed in special cases or things alone.

As Chai points out, in confronting this dilemma, Bichat's arguments gradually move from a substantialist to a functionalist model of explanation, though one that produces further theoretical convolutions of its own. A functionalist account, after all, effectively proceeds from the non-identity or, positively speaking, self-transforming essence of its explanatory principle. Yet to imagine (as Goethe did in his contemporary *Metamorphosis of Plants*) "an activity whose very nature is constantly transformative would unquestionably lead to nothing less than a brave new world for theory" (110). Here, too, Chai's discussion opens helpful perspectives on major theoretical shifts that were to transform the life sciences during the nineteenth century. Across a wide disciplinary spectrum (geology, biology, medicine, evolution), this brave new world for theory was in fact being charted by von Baer, Reill, Lamarck, Cuvier, Lyell, and Darwin. Some of the relevant work on these figures (Robert Richards, Tim Lenoir, David Cahan, Lynn K. Nyhart, among others) might have allowed Chai to adumbrate the broader disciplinary and cultural movement of which Bichat is one (relatively early) representative. Even so, readers with a more canonical outlook on Romantic studies already will find much of interest in both this and Chai's subsequent chapter on Galois's mathematical theories.

Of the remaining chapters (on Coleridge, M. Shelley, and Hölderlin), those on Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* and Hölderlin's "Patmos" offer particularly compelling instances of the overall transformation of theory with which Chai's book is concerned. The later Coleridge functions as a crucial figure in Chai's argument in that, more than most theorists of his generation, he constantly probed "whether [theory] actually delivers what it professes to give, and what its place finally ought to be" (165). Always a process-oriented thinker, Coleridge understood his *Aids to Reflection* as a way of rehearsing the scope and complexity of mental life prior to its becoming absorbed in the maelstrom of utilitarian and instrumental forms of rationality, and Chai is right to see a strong connection here between Coleridge and St. Augustine. By contrast, Chai's subsequent foray into Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—an improbable choice of text for an argument about Romanticism as a meta-theoretical enterprise—makes for a surprisingly weak chapter, both argumentatively and stylistically. Some sections seem rambling (e.g., 174 f), and often little more is offered than a summary of familiar plot developments supplemented by some generic psychologizing (e.g., 173–74). The problem here is not with the cogency of Chai's overall thesis but with his choice of text: the limitations of both Shelley's book and the Gothic genre are such that only a strong critical intervention will be able to extract theoretical points from this narrative. In other words, unlike the work of many other Romantics (Schlegel, Novalis, Coleridge, Hegel, Hölderlin, among others), a work like *Frankenstein* never actually *stages and reflects* theory in the reflexive and meta-discursive ways that Chai considers distinctive of Romanticism. This shortcoming is all the more palpable given that the reading of Mary Shelley is flanked by a discussion of two figures—Coleridge and Hölderlin—who embody Chai's central thesis in particularly fulsome ways. *Romantic Theory* concludes with a fine, wide-ranging epilogue on the afterlife of Romantic theory in the discourse of "critical theory" over the last several decades. Overall, then, Chai's book makes a valuable contribution to the study of Romanticism by demonstrating that period's acute responsiveness to a wide array of theoretical promptings, a responsiveness that reshapes theory itself into a meta-discursive, dynamic, and often unconditional enterprise of thought.

THOMAS PFAU

Duke University