

(2017). *Making the Modern Artist* expands on his 2013 findings, encapsulates his exhaustive investigations, and eschews the familiar biographical narratives that foreground iconic artists such as William Blake and Thomas Gainsborough, narratives which have nevertheless provided substantial subject matter for Myrone's writing. He draws on Marxist and Weberian sociology, and in particular on Bourdieu, 'whose methodological practice provides a guiding spirit for this study' (p.9). He reserves specific indignation for the neat conclusions offered by Holger Hock in *The King's Artists: The Royal Academy and the Politics of British Culture, 1760-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), in which artists' potential achievements are attributed to innate talent. Myrone suggests that this indulges in 'a pervasive fiction about individual talent which sits at the heart of liberal modernity' (p.57). In his conclusions, he returns to Hock's assertions, refuting that 'the market could provide justice, that the talented would rise, the untalented sink into the trades' (p.188).

A newly marketised liberal modernity, 'freed' from the old paternal or workshop ties of traditional artistic apprenticeship, was characterised instead by fraternal ties, often along divisive lines of gender, culture and class. Myrone emphasises the crucial factor of family financial support which enabled students to continue their studies and cushioned them from market instability, increasingly favouring those from a genteel or professional background. His statistics appear in stark line graphs, adding the authority of indisputable numbers to a subject which often relies on broad statement, anecdote and contemporary quotation. The book outlines the failure of the Academy teachers to actually teach, the complaints about bad lighting and facilities, and 'a form of study which was interminable and largely non-linear', assuming that students should be responsible for their own progress (p.29). Occasionally, Myrone's collected data is deliberately deployed to counter our assumptions. It transpires that his long descriptive list of artists' suicides which opens Chapter 4, 'The Social Suffering of the Artist', serves to counter the 'tortured genius' myth of the 'self-contradicting logic of representative exceptionalism' (p.185). He challenges the trope of the impoverished artist in his garret, an artistic bohemian identity that deflects from serious questioning of the social reality.

The case studies and sumptuous illustrations, many of which offer unfamiliar and surprising details from a wide range of sources, are themselves compelling evidence of Myrone's commitment to the subject of the book. He emphasises that his research has developed outside the structures of teaching and institutional networks, and he thus sympathises with the 'unofficial' historians able to function independent of the demands of liberal modernity (p.219). He characterises the book as a result of his 'passionate hobbyism' (p.220). Because he emphasises this approach, he is able to be selective and unapologetic. At times dwelling on intense close readings of images, and at others stating carefully argued criticism of the values and assumptions of current art historical scholarship, he conveys personal empathy with the lesser known artists who failed in their efforts to achieve success and recognition in their chosen careers. The book as such is a landmark in art history, exploring the outer reaches of artistic endeavour, and boldly re-examining the political and sociological impact of the Royal Academy's celebrated undertaking to foster the development of artistic excellence.

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Poetry and British Nationalisms in the Bardic Eighteenth Century: Imagined Antiquities.

By Jeff Strabone. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 2018. 351 p. £54.99 (pb). ISBN 978-3-030-07002-1.

Building on the increased attention that English literary studies have given to the figure of the Celtic bard since the publication of Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* in 1997, Jeff Strabone's monograph further enriches our appreciation of the poetic heritage evoked by often marginalised eighteenth-century writers and the established canon of Romantic literature. Strabone argues that 'archaic native poetry, newly discovered and printed in the eighteenth century, provided historiographical support for the construction of the modern nation' (p.2). Drawing on the work

of Benedict Anderson, he contends that the version of nationalism that emerges can be described as 'modern' (p.49), based upon a shared cultural identity rather than coalescence around elite state and religious institutions.

Pushing beyond both Anderson and Trumpener, however, Strabone addresses the role that poetic form and metre play in such constructions, elements that are often overlooked in socio-cultural studies. This focus gives Strabone's work real value, and his detailed examination of the poetic links between early collators of ancient literary texts and the Romantic poets that followed adds much to our understanding of the relationship between bardic imaginations and the formation of national literatures. In particular, Strabone's reading of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel' (Chapters 4 and 5) – in which he identifies Coleridge's metrical experimentation as an evolution of the Anglo-Saxon metre considered by antiquarian editors such as Thomas Percy – ably demonstrates how a thorough consideration of historical poetics can contribute to an enhanced understanding of a poet's positioning within poetic history.

Strabone's central contention is that 'new poetry, by mimicking the archaic in form and content, forged new poetic continuities between past and present' in spite of the discontinuous transmission of archaic texts across the period (p.2). This argument, though it is among the book's strengths, also exemplifies some of the limitations of Strabone's approach, as well as wider problems endemic within the current sub-field of bardic literary studies. Strabone's argument that the eighteenth century's 'near-total lack of pre-Chaucerian poetry in print' (p.25) resulted in no conscious attempt to revive formulaic Anglo-Saxon principles during the period may be correct in terms of the formal features of such poetry. However, I would argue that thematic continuations of earlier traditions were present in texts such as Dryden's *King Arthur* (1691), as well as in later faux-archaic poems such as Allan Ramsay's 'The Voice' (1724), Thomas Gray's 'The Bard' (1757) and Thomas Warton's 'The Grave of King Arthur' (1777). By privileging formal and prosodic innovations over thematic continuations, Strabone overlooks earlier expressions of the 'modern' nationalism he identifies, and his study makes some omissions – most notably Macpherson's purported translations of Ossian – on the grounds that he finds no evidence that such works 'influenced the form or metre of other poets' work' (p.41). Similarly, Strabone's consideration of his Celtic sources is somewhat limited by its exclusion of non-anglicised texts. His identification of Ramsay's *The Ever Green* (1724) as a foundational text in the collection of 'national relics' (Chapter 2) expands our understanding of Ramsay as a progenitor of the Romantic ballad revival; however, his assertion that Ramsay 'pioneered' the use of bardic narratives of national literary history 'across Scotland, Wales, and England' (p.78) neglects the work of Welsh-language writers and producers such as Theophilus Evans, whose *Drych y Prif Oesoedd* (1716, revised 1740) situated Welsh cultural heritage within both bardic and classical traditions.

Such limitations – which are largely acknowledged and justified – should not, however, detract from the richness of Strabone's methodology. Beginning with an extensive introduction in Chapter 1 that both emphasises the eighteenth century's general lack of interest in printing archaic and medieval texts and situates Strabone's work within a number of wider contexts, Strabone goes on to contrast eighteenth-century interest in anthologies with their formal influence on new poetry. Chapter 2 focuses upon Scotland, concentrating on the work of Ramsay and Thomas Ruddiman, whilst Chapter 3 considers the influence of Evan Evans's *Specimens of the Poetry of the Ancient Welsh Bards* (1764) on the poetry of Thomas Gray. Such comparisons draw out previously hidden metrical links whilst acknowledging the complexity of such relationships, and the ways in which the overlapping – and sometimes contradictory – motivations of such writers fed into the period's construction of cultural continuity.

Strabone's thorough research undoubtably moves the discipline forward whilst also raising questions about the figures and methodologies that lie beyond the scope of this study, hopefully serving as a prompt for future research.

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