Miriam Wallace presents the essays in this collection as a response to a problem that confronts many scholars who work in the fields of eighteenth-century studies and Romanticism: the problem of periodization. All literary historians must deal with it to some extent; but real problems arise with periods like the one, say, between the 1740s (after the deaths of Pope and Swift) and the 1780s (before Blake and Wordsworth start publishing) which are neither one thing (Augustan, eighteenth century) nor another (Romantic). Naming such a period often involves staging a conflict. So we have the age of Johnson versus the age of Shelley and Wordsworth, Enlightenment versus Romanticism, and, Wallace hints, ASECS versus NASSR. “As eighteenth-century scholarship has expanded its range, both historically and in its consideration of more popular and less elite cultural artifacts,” she writes, “so has what used to be known as ‘Romanticism’. As a consequence, novels from about 1750 to 1833 have become a rich and contested site of critical overlap” (1). James Raven’s work shows that the novel experienced a dramatic rise in numbers in the second half of the eighteenth century. But both the range and the mix of features that characterize the genre in these years make it difficult to maintain “any strict distinction between eighteenth-century literary traditions and Romantic literary traditions” (19). What, then, do we do with this period so central to a genre of increasing interest to many of us?

Wallace’s introduction, “Enlightened Romanticism or Romantic Enlightenment,” also stages the problem as a conflict, or choice. But the aim of the collection, which consists of nine essays and two responses, is not to push us in one direction or the other but rather, first, to identify the
common ground that has been cleared by scholars working in both fields – the novel, in this case; and second, to foster dialogue between these scholars about this common ground. The contributors invited to the collection, says Wallace, “identify as scholars specializing in either the eighteenth century or in Romanticism” (1) – but not, it seems, in both or neither. It is the works themselves – “works legitimately incorporated under both ‘eighteenth-century studies’ and ‘Romanticism’” (1) – that serve as the occasion for them to meet and discuss the overlap between their respective fields.

Wallace’s emphasis on dialogue works well overall, allowing for an impressive range of dates, texts, and figures to be brought into contact. But it sometimes has the unintentional effect of solidifying what Wallace aims to refuse: “an easy opposition between an eighteenth century Enlightenment ideology consisting of rationality, propriety, and progress and a Romantic ideology identified by inspiration, heroic individualism, and sublime emotionality” (16).

In the first essay in the collection, for example, “Novel Romanticism in 1751: Eliza Haywood’s Betsy Thoughtless,” Margaret Case Croskery argues that, “[a]lthough it was written in the middle of the eighteenth century, Haywood’s novel thematizes an essentially Romantic stance to the absorptive powers of fiction” (23). Her essay begins with a concise and insightful summary of a tension that pervades eighteenth-century discussions on the novel: that between delighting readers, which required complicated, or “round,” characters whose virtues are mixed with the occasional flaw, and instructing them, which required a more “limited verisimilitude” such as Samuel Johnson describes in his Rambler No. 4 essay (22). The novel was able to do both, of course. As Case Croskery makes clear via subtle readings of Betsy Thoughtless and Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749), a kind of instruction was introduced that worked precisely through affective identification. “Betsy Thoughtless,” she writes, “provides a locus classicus for a shift in development of novelistic narrative in which the intractable problem of instructing with delight is fully integrated at both the structural and the thematic level” (30).
What I want to press here a bit is not the reading of Haywood’s novel or the conclusion about instructing with delight. I find both convincing. It’s the added claim that this development qualifies as “an essentially Romantic trust in affective education” (30) and “[recasts]” Haywood as a “Romantic novelist” (24). As Patricia Meyer Spacks reminds us in the first of the two response essays in the collection, works like Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) make clear that the roles of sympathy, affect, and imagination were already very much pronounced in the Enlightenment era. In addition, a Romantic period reduced to affect and imagination sounds like one of those easy oppositions *Enlightening Romanticism* was supposed to resist. One response to this is offered by Spacks herself: “Haywood’s novel,” she writes, “suggests the possibility that the period shift between ‘the eighteenth century’ and ‘the Romantic’ period makes no sense at all” (180). In other words, if the kinds of affective identification that we thought were Romantic turn up 50 years prior, why treat them in terms of period at all? Another response is suggested by Wallace, who explains that, “[i]n a simple sense, where eighteenth-century scholars see continuity and continuing development, Romantic scholars are often invested in the narrative of Romantic exceptionalism” (10). Case Croskery, in this reading, posits an important continuity (and I think she does) – although “continuity” here signals not so much an argument as an orientation. A third possibility is one that might be offered by a scholar who identifies with neither period and who uses categories like affect or imagination precisely to explain the shift from one period to the next. I’m thinking of someone like Mark Salber Phillips, who also writes about the Enlightenment’s “preoccupation with sympathy and inwardness.” He argues that “our image of the historical sensibility of the Enlightenment as wholly abstract and detached is in many ways a myth created by the Romantics as a foil for their own critique” (“Relocating Inwardness” [2003] 437, 446).

Taking a similar approach, some of the essays here productively alter the terms and issues at stake and highlight the interplay between meanings and associations across periods. Examining Jane
West’s *The Advantages of Education*, Daniel Schierenbeck sets aside the Romanticist distinction between Jacobin and anti-Jacobin fiction, which ends up pitting West’s work against that of her contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, and focuses instead on a feature common to both writers: an anti-romance stance grounded in a critique (and endorsement) of female education. But where for Schierenbeck the Jacobin / anti-Jacobin distinction occludes certain shared concerns between writers like West and Wollstonecraft, who did not share a political position, for Shawn Lisa Maurer the term “Jacobin” is useful precisely because of its political character. In her excellent essay on “The Politics of Masculinity,” she argues that Jacobin writers like Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin “incorporate, criticize, and ultimately transform” the “Enlightenment ideology of male friendship as a wholly affective, personal, rational, and often familial phenomenon” (87-88).

Maurer’s emphasis on the category of friendship enables her not only to describe an Enlightenment ideal that is rational, affective, and at least theoretically egalitarian, but also to explain how the political conditions that marked the 1790s led writers to question and politicize such ideals. In her readings of Hugh Trevor and Caleb Williams, she shows how Jacobin writers like Holcroft and Godwin “reveal the underlying foundation of friendship as status, hierarchy, and power” (93).

Shelley King’s essay on Amelia Opie’s *Adeline Mowbray* acknowledges both of the previous essays and offers its own account of how “commonplaces” of eighteenth-century fiction like marriage and dueling are transformed in Opie’s writing “into a Romantic political statement” (111). Like Maurer, King uses the tumultuous events of the 1790s to account for the ways that “institutions governing feminine and masculine honor” are altered, critiqued, and politicized. And like Schierenbeck, she shows that the conservative / radical binary so common to studies of the period lacks the necessary nuance for characterizing a writer like Opie. Situated as they are in the 1790s, these three essays (chapters four, five, and six) form a mini-section in the collection and provide it with a kind of center. As Wallace says in her introduction, the decade of the 1790s is the
“locus” of important, cross-period work in eighteenth-century and Romantic studies (1). And Spacks, too, identifies it as the true subject of the volume. “[O]ne might be tempted,” she writes, “to conclude that literary history should focus, at least in part, not on artificially designed periods but on arbitrary, limited stretches of time” (188). Schierenbeck, Maurer, and King all help to show how specific ideas or categories changed in the political sides-taking of the 1790s. All three also implicitly evoke what Paul Keen calls the “crisis” in the category of Literature that occurred at just that point where the age of Johnson meets the Romantic age.

Two other essays in the collection highlight this crisis as it was registered at the level of form. In his essay on “Epistolary Trouble,” Scott C. Campbell argues that a kind of generic self-consciousness inhabits Charlotte Smith’s Desmond (1792). The Revolution Debate may have inspired novelists to challenge custom and convention, he suggests, but it did not point a clear path toward resolution. Jacobin novels like Desmond, therefore, feature “fractured and failed versions of recognizable types from the eighteenth-century novel” and point to a “discernable resistance to narrative authority” (67). On the other hand, Tara Ghoshal Wallace reminds us that novelists of the 1790s did not have to look back to the earlier part of the century for failed models of authority. They could look out across their own increasingly global present. Drawing on and contributing to a recent interest in postcolonial approaches to the eighteenth century, Wallace calls Elizabeth Hamilton’s Translation of a Hindoo Rajah (1796) a “double-voiced text” (131), one that both justifies British rule in India and shows its author to be “deeply troubled by the consequences of the imperial mission, particularly when these are connected to moral and social corruption in the home country” (131). Her reading explores the decade’s engagements with the wider world and subtly examines the progressive historicism of the Scottish Enlightenment that underpinned these engagements.

There is a lot here on the 1790s, then, as one could expect in a collection inspired by a 2003 NEH Summer Seminar on “Rethinking British Romantic Fiction” (led by Stephen Behrendt). But
lest the reader suspect that to enlighten the Romantic and romance the Enlightenment means being dismissed from the falsehood and impossibility of long-form literary history and delivered over to the limited (if arbitrary) reality of a decade, there are several essays in the collection which, like Case Croskery’s, range farther afield. Julie Shaffer, for instance, finds in Elizabeth Lester’s novel, *The Woman of Genius* (1821-22), a kind of self-consciousness about generic confusion similar to the one Campbell notes in Charlotte Smith’s novel of the 1790s. And Christopher Flynn pushes the period problem even farther in examining the fiction of Frances Trollope, whom he describes as a Victorian writer born in the Romantic period with eighteenth-century sensibilities. In one of the richest and most wide-ranging essays in the collection, Peter Walmsley examines the “curious interdependencies of discourses of death and nation” (41) bequeathed by Enlightenment writers like John Locke and René Descartes to later practitioners of the Gothic and sentimental such as Edward Young and Laurence Sterne. After tracing a “wide vein” of graveyard writing across the century, he concludes with the 1790s, noting that the Gothic texts of that decade drew on these interdependent discourses “in a moment of extreme, growing and possibly contagious political violence, harnessing the fear of death to an articulation of the nation and its destiny” (52).

*Enlightening Romanticism* itself concludes with Stephen Behrendt’s “Cultural Transitions, Literary Judgments, and the Romantic-Era British Novel,” the second of the collection’s two response essays. This lucid and measured assessment of recent scholarship on the Romantic novel includes an interesting sketch of the geographer, novelist, and critic, Hugh Murray, who regarded novels as “a lamentable waste of time” (195). Behrendt highlights a shift in the qualitative criteria for evaluating novels, toward more “intellectually generous” and “culturally expansive” (190) terms. He also points to a recent quantitative turn – or at least to the possibility of one, thanks to the bibliographic work of Raven, Peter Garside, and William St. Clair. Citing Clifford Siskin’s claim that scholars too often skip over the moment of the novel’s actual rise (the decades between Richardson
and Fielding on one side and Jane Austen on the other), Behrendt remarks that “we are paying attention now, as the present volume attests” (192).

To this I would say both yes and no. “Yes” because the essays in this collection do attend to the diverse forms the novel took in these difficult-to-characterize years. The wide focus provided by the book’s period-scheme – 1750-1832 – allows for a sense not of what the novel became (Austen, Walter Scott) but of what it could have become. What we see is a form not yet sure of itself, but full of possibilities, ideas, and directions. But I also say “no” in that the book’s focus remains pretty much squarely in the realm of the qualitative. In other words, while this volume closely examines a number of specific novels, it offers far less on the novel and on the period in which it exploded in popularity and variety. Behrendt provides a brief glimpse of the latter, arguing as he does for a mixed period (he still calls it Romanticism) defined by a very high level of generic mixing. But while this useful insight is itself made possible by the kinds of readings offered here, it also suggests the need for a different kind of work: for rethinking, as I said above, what we do with periods like the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Wallace says that there are “two main approaches” represented in the collection: the first takes material from one of the periods in question and reads it from the perspective of the other; the second is less concerned with period, per se, and instead “[invokes] subgenres, influences, marginalized and appropriated voices” (17). What both approaches have in common is that they are “textually-focused” (16). To the question of what we do with these years that are so central to the history of the novel, Wallace and her fellow contributors answer: read them more closely.

Given the difficulty of the question, which many of us struggle with in our writing and teaching, this is a responsible answer. But given the clarity and urgency with which this book poses the problem of periodization, the answer is also a bit unsatisfying. Will it be enough to generate more close readings of more novels on Raven’s list, until the period has been read fully? Siskin’s
work, which Behrendt points to as a kind of map, suggests that such a course would be neither
helpful nor desirable. Critics like Franco Moretti argue that it’s not even possible. Perhaps then a
second volume on the subject is in order, one that continues in this other direction signaled by
Behrendt and that “zooms out,” as Siskin describes it, to recognize larger patterns between genres
and periods and between qualitative and quantitative change (The Work of Writing [1999] 16; “Textual
Culture in the History of the Real” [2007] 127)?

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