Britain was full of botanists during the Romantic period. Amateurs and professionals alike participated in a vast network of exchange that stretched from England to India, from Rousseau to Wordsworth, from Erasmus to Charles Darwin. Romantic botany, however, is difficult to categorize: all at once, it is scientific, literary, artistic, and philosophical. How does botanical discourse work within these seemingly separate fields? How did botany shape the ideas of the period? What can botany teach us about Romantic literature and culture?

Addressing these questions in an impressive and expansive study, Theresa Kelley argues that botany informs the most important issues of the Romantic period. In particular, Kelley shows how strange and monstrous plants "that pushed against epistemic mastery" gave Romantics a way of thinking in and out of conventional binaries and categories (1). Kelley focuses on the middle ground that plants occupy in the kingdom of nature, an uncertain space that challenges the Enlightenment impulse to categorize and control. Central to her study are two strands of botany that develop during the period: the Linnaean attempt to classify and order all plants, and a persistent interest in the strange, the monstrous, and the uncanny. Kelley
takes the title of her book from the English translation of Linnaeus' twenty-fourth category, "Cryptogamia," which included plants that defied his taxonomic system. Despite Linnaeus' attempt to marginalize these plants, Kelley argues that they generated endless fascination and speculation, and thus prompted a range of Romantic discourses on the philosophy of nature, the nature of knowledge, and the relationships between different modes of thinking and being. In other words, Romantic botany was never just about plants.

Kelley's monograph is the first book-length study of Romantic botany. While it has long been known that an unprecedented number of Romantic writers and artists focused on plants, flowers, and the natural world, their interest in botany has been understudied. In shedding fresh light on this topic, Kelley's book takes its place with recent studies of the intersections between literature and science, as well as with scholarship in the field tenuously labeled ecocriticism (even though she does not use this word). Clandestine Marriage has much in common with Richard Sha’s Perverse Romanticism (2009), Alan Richardson's The Neural Sublime (2011), and Janelle Schwartz's Worm Work (2012). What these books respectively do for sexuality, cognitive science, and worms, Kelley’s book does for plants.

Kelley's methodology is necessarily interdisciplinary. Besides tracing a history of botany from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, she examines a range of texts and images, including scientific studies and
essays; poetry, prose, and fiction; journals, letters, and magazines; British and Indian art; and philosophical works. After the Introduction, the ensuing chapters mine these various sources. Chapters 2 and 3 outline the key debates over taxonomy and morphology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Chapter 4 highlights women writers and botanists, providing case studies of three painters and several literary vignettes. Chapter 5 treats John Clare alone, and Chapter 6 treats the imperial implications of botany as British colonists collaborated with Indian artists and gardeners. In the last two chapters, Kelley juxtaposes the poetry of Shelley with the philosophies of nature enunciated by Goethe and Hegel, and then concludes with an extended analysis of the orchid.

This book generates its major questions from Linnaeus' taxonomical system and its rivals. In the opening chapters, Kelley explains the conflict between the Linnaean system and the Natural system. While the former posited twenty-four fixed categories based on the reproductive organs of plants, the latter offered one hundred plant families based on various hierarchies and affinities. For the Romantics, this taxonomic debate contraposed a world of fixed, stable entities with a world of chaotic, ever-changing accumulation. If the Enlightenment aimed to reveal the order and structure of all things in the world, Kelley asks, "what happens if nature itself cannot be so ordered? What will knowledge look like if it is not hierarchical and stable? Where do individuals fit if they are only individuals without categories?" (23). Erasmus Darwin dramatizes these questions in
the second part of *The Botanic Garden*, "The Loves of Plants." Here, Kelley argues, the Linnaean emphasis on plant sexuality is challenged by the formal interplay between Darwin's verse and his notes, which jointly strive to break free of Linnaean order and authority. The monstrous plants of Darwin's poem, writes Kelley, often "run loose, their personifications slipping from verse to note and back again with an abandon that takes little notice of the poem's purported distinction between scientific and 'looser' analogy" (79). Darwin further challenges the Linnaean system by highlighting female sexuality, thus reversing Linnaeus' patriarchal ordering of plants based on their male reproductive organs.

At the same time, as Kelley shows in Chapter 4, Darwin's depiction of plants and flowers as women displaces the Linnaean taxonomy with the economy of gender. Even as women were culturally portrayed as flowers, a rising number of women practiced botany. Challenging the "ornamental" role of flowers and women alike, the female botanists of the Romantic era produced their own botanical science and art. As Kelley argues, botany "was by turns or by degrees an appropriate female accomplishment and a disturbing activity" (98). For example, Maria Jackson published a series of educational books on botany that deferred to Linnaeus and other male botanists while subtly questioning the validity of that system. Likewise, Kelley shows, three female artists of the period veered from feminine conventions in depicting plants: instead of outlining them in pencil and watercolors, these women painted plants in microscopic detail and
developed new artistic practices, such as Mary Delany's "paper mosaics" (Kelley 114). Further examples of what might be called subversive botanizing can be found in Romantic literature. In the midst of an impassioned dramatic reading in William Godwin's novel *Fleetwood* (1805), the title character is infuriated when his wife suddenly sets off to investigate a rare species of plants. Anna Barbauld showed her independence more subtly. When she compared her friend Mary Priestley to a beautiful flower in a poem called "To a Lady, with some painted Flowers," Godwin's wife Mary Wollstonecraft read the comparison as exemplifying the masculine language of power. But Kelley reads it differently. In offering Priestley "lilies," a family of flowers often used to show relationships to other plant families, Barbauld implicitly makes Priestley part of an extended "family" of writers and scientists. Unlike Wollstonecraft, Kelley notes, "readers trained in natural history" would have recognized the allusion (100). Barbauld's poem thus uses botanical figures to both support and unsettle social order.

In her chapter on John Clare, Kelley turns from the botanical politics of gender to the botanical politics of language. Clare's rural and common language resists both English authority and rigid taxonomy. Rejecting the Linnaean system and the parallel effects of land enclosure, Clare preferred the local names of plants and flowers in his poems of place. Clare also reveals a Romantic fascination with the monstrous that shaped his views of botany, philosophy, and poetry alike. According to Kelley, "Clare's fascination with wild varieties that defy fixed taxonomic judgments about
species and his use of poetic figures that create figurative hybrids constitute a practical and poetic intervention in the modern debate about what words can and cannot do and how they name and organize knowledge" (149).

Yet the chapter on Clare raises a pressing question: how exactly does Kelley understand literary representations of "nature"? This is a hotly-debated question in the field of ecocriticism, which Kelley conspicuously avoids mentioning, and scholars are generally divided into two groups. The first sees any attempt to represent "nature" as an impossible task because nature is a social construct that cannot be disengaged from ecology. The second group believes that poetic representations of nature may be able to fuse its material and ideological elements so as to create a genuine vision of the natural world. Though Kelley seems to belong to the second group, as she suggests in an endnote (132), her circumvention of ecocriticism leaves unanswered a series of questions involving the broader study of Romantic literature and ecology. What exactly did Romantic writers and botanists mean by "nature"? How does botanical nature relate to literary and philosophical Nature? To what extent did poets, philosophers, botanists, and scientists differ in their representations of and ideas about nature? As scholars continue to study these questions in light of ecocriticism, we need to know just how Romantic uses of botany can help us answer them.

Kelley more explicitly engages the materiality of nature in her analyses of botanical art. Throughout the book, but particularly in the sections on imperialism and Indian art, Kelley shows how the rise and
popularity of botanical illustrations led to a variety of artistic practices in which plants themselves (and plant-based materials) were often used. Artists produced these illustrations not only for botanists, who were often unable to study exotic, foreign plants in their natural environs (or see them alive at all), but also for a voracious public who delighted in big, expensive, commercial books for aesthetic pleasure. In thus enlightening both British botanists and the British public, Kelley argues, Indian artists disrupted the dominant imperial narrative written by Romantic Europeans and modern scholars alike.

British imperialism also gets into what Kelley calls Shelley's "poetics of plant life." In depicting Asia as embodied Love in *Prometheus Unbound*, we are told, Shelley draws from botanical imperialism, and in "The Sensitive Plant" and *The Triumph of Life*, he also engages in Romantic debates about nature and life. In both of the latter poems Kelley finds him "turning away" from Darwin's loves of the plants as well as questioning Neo-Platonism and idealism. Whereas the botanical processes of decay and death act as threats in Darwin's poetry, they become in Shelley's poetry an integral part of both plant and human life. This, suggests Kelley, is what happens when we "think of plants as animate beings (or not)" (215).

From Shelley's botanism Kelley turns to the problematic status of plants in Romantic philosophy. In a debate between Hegel and Goethe on the nature of plant life, Kelley explains, Hegel sees a structure and order in nature that lends itself to his well-known dialectic and the triumph of Spirit
(read: Linnaeus and Plato). By contrast, Goethe tends to see nature as ever-changing and continually developing in a "metamorphosis" that links all plants (read: Natural System and Aristotle, verging on evolution). But if nature can adapt to anything thrown its way, Hegel thought, it undermines the work and role of Spirit. Ultimately, Kelley links this debate to Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics, a project the Frankfurt thinker suggests he adopted after it was abandoned by Hegel. Such philosophical maneuverings highlight Kelley's larger point about the role of botany in Romantic-era thinking: "Particular, various, and as such uneasily assimilated to the species, genera, and system to which they are said to belong, plants register the philosophical and material pressure of remainders, points of excess, in romantic system-thinking" (245). These philosophical debates take shape (again) in what Kelley calls "orchid-mania," or the intense curiosity about wild orchids that developed during the Romantic period (247). Since the natural hybridity of the orchid defies fixed classification, Kelley's chapter on this flower provides a fitting conclusion to the book.

For all its virtues, Kelley's study sprawls. Rather than extensively probing a major work such as Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, for instance, it moves on after two or three pages of close but limited analysis. Also, in often leaping from one kind of source to another--from literature to philosophy, pictorial art, letters, magazines, and scientific texts (often in the space of a few paragraphs)--it demands a similar acrobatics of reading. Nevertheless, this eclecticism also manifests the brilliance of the book.*Clandestine*
*Marriage* is a veritable encyclopedia of botany in the Romantic period, a book that not only discovers, enumerates, and illuminates key details and facts but also crafts a truly amazing argument: that the literary, aesthetic, philosophical, and scientific disruptions of the Romantic period were shaped and paralleled by the ways in which plants were seen to disrupt the kingdom of nature. *Clandestine Marriage* opens up new avenues for thinking, reading, and writing about a variety of Romantic texts, and it should be of interest to anyone studying Romanticism and the nineteenth century.

Seth Reno is Visiting Assistant Professor of English at Wittenberg University.