In her view secular realism, Nersessian argues, "concerns itself with the sensuous manifestation of bounded but evanescent experiences of historical change" (46) and through this lens she does a lovely reading of Coleridge’s "Dejection." In this pursuit, Nersessian rejects the Romantic dichotomy between apocalypse and earthly paradise most memorably expressed by M. H. Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971). In its place she posits a new kind of middle ground, a Romanticism "understood as a mode of visionary minimalism" that "defines utopianism as an investment in limitations, a definition derived from the basic claim that the ethico-political project of utopia is formally analogous to the project of art" (17, 18). This view of Romanticism, she explains, "fetishes neither apocalyptic ruin nor its redemption" but imagines instead "the perfect world as a place where grief, loss, suffering, and habits of self-denial--all far from the surfeit implied by the word 'perfect'--become essential to the idea of utopia per se" (2). Ranging from the late Enlightenment to the early Victorian era, Nersessian finds examples in a wide array of texts including works by Helen Maria Williams, Immanuel Kant, William Wordsworth, S. T. Coleridge, Thomas Holcroft, Percy Shelley, Sidney Owenson, Thomas Moore, William Hazlitt, Harriet Martineau, John Clare, and John Keats.

So what do the "limited" utopias envisioned by such writers look like? They are not dystopian, like Shelley's *Last Man*, nor "brightly-rendered visions where everyone is virtuous and no one is hungry" (6), as in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. Rather, limited utopianism "identifies the labor of pruning that which is already 'fruitful' with the promise of becoming both 'more fruitful' and yet differently so," as in George Herbert's poem "Paradise," which lops off letters on the last words of each successive line (7). While broadly situating this marriage of the political and the aesthetic within Marxist and Neo-Marxist literary criticism (Theodor Adorno is the most central of the Frankfurt School for her study), Nersessian also engages a wide array of critics too numerous to list here, not to mention occasional pop culture references from Archie Bunker to Sesame Street that leaven this book in humorous and provocative ways. In exhilarating flights of close reading, Nersessian shows how "the formal decorum of a specific poem, novel or philosophical narrative forces a fit between what the text presents as the language of limitlessness, and the acquisitive model it licenses." Aiming to "redefine utopianism as a positive investment in limitations," Nersessian seeks inspiration from the Romantics because, she argues, they "think about utopia in the same way as they think about art, as a means of capturing and thereby emancipating an infinite human potential within a finite space" (19). She envisions a "Romanticism of adjustment whose ambitions are keyed to self-abnegation in the face of planetary fragility and the diminishing possibilities it entails" (4).

The chapters of this book range widely and wildly at times. The first chapter is inspired by Northrup Frye’s references to "low adjustment utopia" and what Nersessian calls his desire to "provide a triangulated link between Romantic literature, the genre of romance, and utopian philosophy" by linking Romanticism’s "idiosyncratic and revolutionary conception" of both aesthetics and politics (20). Building on this insight, Nersessian claims that "adjustment allows for a variation on the genre of romance" because romance envisions "indeterminate but presumptively better futures" (31). Wordsworth is invoked here and again in the second chapter, "Worldfeel," which adapts Kant’s idea of "worldview" to account for Romantic works in which “skepticism about religious practice motivates a figuration of the ordinary as a space of metaphysical profundity” (10). Secular realism, Nersessian argues, "concerns itself with the sensuous manifestation of bounded but evanescent experiences of historical change" (46) and through this lens she does a lovely reading of Coleridge’s "Dejection." In her view secular realism is "an entanglement with ordinariness that, from the perspective of limited utopianism, might present itself as a social and political goal" (60).

But is Romantic "submersion in the everyday" more important than the desire for "propulsion beyond it" (60)? Coleridge in particular always searches for an orientation toward the transcendent divine, even if the divine is to be discerned in and through nature. Likewise I question Nersessian’s claim that Wordsworth’s "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is just "a song in praise of slightly greater things as they are treated by the formal labor of poetry and its oblique poiesis" (63). This reading strips the poem of its yearning for transcendence, a yearning that inspired whole movements to pursue a
world beyond the five senses. (I am thinking here of the American Transcendentalists and Ralph Waldo Emerson, who in English Traits declared the poem "the high water-mark the human intellect has reached in this age"). Nevertheless, Nersessian deftly aestheticizes the transcendent and evokes some of the poem's aesthetic and expansiveness in other ways: "[T]his secular and romantic realism," she writes, "is saturated and suffused by something sensuously immaterial, whose name is not God but the experience of living in a world tipped forward, and of riding shotgun on its glinting verge" (64). Such flights of language make this book very pleasurable reading, even if I am not always persuaded by the way in which the aesthetic is taken to its utmost limit.

In chapter three, Nersessian treats Shelley's The Revolt of Islam (1818), which she describes as "a strange allegorical adventure in Platonic philosophy, Zoroastrian symbolism, erotic love, socialist revolution, vegetarianism, and orientalist cliché" (75). In the poem, she argues, loss becomes an "additive phenomenon, in particular when loss is effected and sustained through sexual harm" (10). Alexander, Laon, and Cythna sacrifice "their possessions, their names, their lives--to preserve the world." In thus helping to create an environment from which they themselves are shut out, and which "nonetheless holds out the promise of breathing room for less avaricious creatures," they embody Nersessian's concept of a limited utopia (108-9).

In another imaginative leap, Nersessian examines two examples of anticolonial writing in Irish Romanticism. She contends that Owenson's The Wild Irish Girl (1806) and Moore's The Memoirs of Captain Rock (1824) derive from a "mixed political genealogy that traffics in an aesthetics of bad taste" (111) because of their sentimentality and interest in the lurid. More evocatively, she says, they could be called "unctuous, effusive, sappy, syrupy, cheesy, mushy, drippy, and sometimes bloody, soaked in gore" (113). In a "formulation of excess," she writes, these two works can "expose and outdo the refuse of empire by turning its unregulated gobbling and disgorging to a carefully calibrated aesthetic program" (113). The playfulness of these comments belies some very serious close readings, such as a superb analysis of the way empire is critiqued in "a letter from the Earl of M--" at the end of The Wild Irish Girl:

The future of Ireland turns on an anxiety about hunger articulated in the idiom of bad taste, with its nutritive beams, genial glows, warm hands, cold dews, throbbing, pulsing, and reverberating. The overall picture is one of sterility converted to fertility, as English hands chafe Irish earth and Irish hearts into the liquid light of photosynthetic processes. Improvement is defined as the resolution of a real problem--hunger--through allegorical means: the body (brow, heart, feelings) becomes the people and the people become the land, but the land never becomes recognizable as a nation. Confined to and by allegory, Irish land does not add up to "Ireland" but exists as a once-squandered and presently untapped resource for nourishment. (127)

Through such attentive close readings, Nersessian demonstrates that "against all odds, bad taste turns out to have a utopian impulse all its own (141). This is brilliant stuff and an exhilarating intellectual ride replete with unexpected turns and swerves.

From Irish Romanticism Nersessian turns to William Hazlitt's Liber Amoris (1823) as an example of "limited--or, to use his word--partisan utopianism" that "refuses to abandon the category of the political as a locus of obsessive, self-destructive engagement (11). Nersessian describes the work as "set in what might be called the 1980s of Romanticism--a period during which the revolutionary hopes of earlier decades were tailored into an advertisement for the nation-state as those of later decades would be used for the discourse of freedom as free trade" (146, 145). For Nersessian, the Liber Amoris is a Romantic fragment that "remains resolutely open, its multiple vectors of feeling and interest bounding wildly off one another with a velocity that threatens the whole thing with disintegration" (167). The unifying thread here, which is sometimes hard to follow (but never dull), is the congruence between the formal and political: a congruence expressed by Hazlitt's idea of partisanship as embodying the concept of limitation.

In her final chapter, Nersessian examines the transition from the Romantic to the Victorian in light of renunciation, abstinence, and austerity. This is my favorite chapter, not only because it reads the poetry of Keats and Clare with scintillating freshness but also because it more directly applies ecocritical approaches that might have been engaged more fully elsewhere. No book can be everything, of course, but this chapter furnished what I originally expected to find in the book as a whole: a more explicitly ecocritical reading of Romanticism. Further engagement with scholarship on Green Romanticism would have enriched the rest of the book as well, and this final chapter could have benefitted from excellent ecocritical readings of John Clare by Simon Kövesi and Scott Hess. Such readings help to answer the more nitty-gritty question of utopia: namely, how to live.

Nevertheless, Nersessian's account of Clare brings her argument down to earth. Romantic utopianism, she contends, is based on "a restraint keyed to the renunciatory management of resources, from food to language" (176). As a case in point, Clare lived in and loved "a landscape that had been changed utterly by the slicing and dicing and mapping and tracking" of the Enclosure Acts, which was nothing less than an "ecosystemic calamity" for a man like Clare, who labored on the land (198). Clare, Nersessian writes, was "Romanticism's first self-conscious ecologist, whose sensuous immersion in the local, even at the point of its obsolescence, chimes with the injunction towards abbreviated desires and acts of small, inhibited impact" (199).

Turning from Clare to the embodiment of utopia in Keats' "Ode to Psyche," Nersessian finds that it "confronts loss by distributing excess as a safeguard against it, and more crucially, by playing up the fact that its excesses are purely linguistic and therefore, one might say, biodegradable" (200). In this fascinating reading, "Keats's poem does not try to transcend the world's materiality but to temper the harm done to it by maximizing the inventiveness of the mind" (201). Such inventiveness could be considered the leitmotif of this book.

Nersessian's vision of limited utopia hits its stride in this final chapter, especially when she writes of Keats's "Psyche": "if there is something utopian in the many gestures of limitation that structure this poem and its fame, it is in the poet's advocacy of an art that takes up as little room, breathes as little air, and leaves as infinitesimal a material trace as it possibly can," thus moving away from the desire of "having it all" with "lively and livable practices of renunciation" (204, 206). (It doesn't hurt that in Keats's case, the end product is also great art.) In her introduction, Nersessian claims that "[w]hen it comes to the hard work of living limitedly, the Romantics have been here before us, at least in theory and her book, she says, "uses their insights to sketch a roadmap for our restricted present" (13). Yet a roadmap is prosaic and this book is not: if it is indeed a roadmap, it is a fantastical one, which is both its charm and its challenge, for at times it requires leaps of imagination to comprehend. Perhaps, however, we need these leaps most of all. In the words of James McKusick, the Romantics "offer pathways to a better future than we could otherwise imagine" (Green Writing [2000] 228), and surely
nothing is more sorely needed for our imperiled planet than maps of those pathways, even if those maps begin in the imagination.

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