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Aims and Scope: Formerly *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* (1997–2005), *Romantic Textualities: Literature and Print Culture, 1780–1840* is an online journal that is committed to foregrounding innovative Romantic-studies research into bibliography, book history, intertextuality, and textual studies. To this end, we publish material in a number of formats: among them, peer-reviewed articles, reports on individual/group research projects, bibliographical checklists and biographical profiles of overlooked Romantic writers. *Romantic Textualities* also carries reviews of books that reflect the growing academic interest in the fields of book history, print culture, intertextuality and cultural materialism, as they relate to Romantic studies.

attempts. These early letters are didactic and sentimental; they champion the ennobling bonds of friendship; and they clearly show the influence of Richardson's *Clarissa*, Rousseau's *Julie*, Prior's 'Henry and Emma' and Pope's Eloisa, among others. In contrast, the two manuscript letter collections that Seward sent to her friends Mary Powys and Dorothy Sykes offer an example of the 'minutiae of life' and the unstudied "blots and blunders" of a busily-writing young woman' (p. 73). A restrictive word count probably hindered longer transcriptions of the many original letters quoted in the course of the biography, but a few more examples of these letters alongside the edited published ones would have greatly enhanced the picture Barnard paints.

Barnard makes an excellent case for Seward's epistolary self-construction and iconoclastic career; her biography also offers a wealth of insights for the student and scholar of eighteenth-century literary history. Seward's Lichfield literary salon is a lively counterpoint to the London-based Bluestockings; her joint poetic efforts with both male and female friends reveal the ongoing importance of manuscript circulation and collaborative composition; and her extraordinary self-determination in love and friendship offers an alternative model of how an individualistic woman could conduct her life in the eighteenth century. 

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Nina L. Dubin, *Futures and Ruins: Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Art of Hubert Robert* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), x + 197pp. ISBN 978-1-60606-023-0; £35 (hb). ISBN 978-1-60606-1-404; £24.99 (pb).

A RELIABLE TREATMENT OF THE WORK OF 'ROBERT DES RUINES' (Hubert Robert, 1733–1808) has been wanting for many years, and Nina Dubin's *Futures and Ruins* will amply meet this need for a considerable time. It is certainly the best we have in English, and in many respects at least as good as any treatment of the artist in his native French. In a sense it prepares the way for the better integration of Hubert Robert's work into larger accounts of the fashion for ruins, the picturesque and the turmoil of the age of revolution, and if our recognition of the possibilities which open up suggest limitations in Nina Dubin's treatment of her topic, this is unfair. Interdisciplinary studies of the visual and verbal culture of the period can now for the first time be fed with a balanced account of this central though often underestimated artist, and his brands of ruinism, disaster painting and the aesthetics of urban change. The possibilities it presents are a measure of the work's contribution to knowledge and not a symptom of weakness.

The central thesis of the book is that the phase of anticipated ruinism which occupied the second half of the eighteenth century was formatted by the recent

growth in the mathematics of probability, which sought in part to explain the vagaries of fortune by means more grounded than the Wheel of Fortune or the guiding hand of Providence, and which accompanied the disastrous reliance on public credit which made the collapse of the French economy and governance inevitable. In this respect, Dubin maintains, Robert and his fellows stand on the brink of modernity. Robert, with his first great critic, Diderot, gave a new, deeper significance to visions of ruins, provoking reflection on the time when the ruined building was first erected, the anterior time to which inscriptions on the ruins refer, and the impermanence of the artist's and critic's own civilisation. Diderot was clear that significant ruins had to be grand, a view which became distinctly *passé* as the fashion for the picturesque took hold. Hubert Robert on the other hand kept up-to-date by turning to paintings of urban fires and of demolition, and the clearing or moving of burials. When he came to depict the Grand Gallery of the Louvre as it was intended it should be in its prime as a public attraction, and then added a vision of it as a ruin in the distant future, he was returning to an old link between ruins and grandeur, as befitted the growing self-conscious *gloire* of post-revolutionary France. It is one of Dubin's few lapses that she leaves the explanation of anticipated ruins as aggrandisement of the present until near the end of the book, whereas it should be a significant factor throughout, growing in importance as the future reputation of the Empire became an object of concern.

The ruins beloved by the late eighteenth century were usually produced by the collapse of one civilisation and the *translatio imperii* to another through conquest, attrition over time, natural catastrophe or economic collapse. Alternatively they were structures which were either unfinished or built to resemble ruins. Alongside the ruins of Athens, Rome, Palmyra and Balbec, too, was the supposedly more benign ruination caused by the urban planning of the period. Dubin deals very well with urban clearances and demolitions, and gives one of the best English language accounts we have of how the ground was already being prepared for Baron Haussmann and the responses of Baudelaire. On one minor point she is at fault: Paris did not lead the way in demolishing the houses on its bridges, London having already cleared those from London Bridge a decade before. All told, it is fascinating to be presented with the century's awareness of risk and the new discipline of urban planning as somehow linked phenomena. Construction as destruction of the familiar is a well-worn topic, but never more convincingly presented.

There are plenty of reminders of Robert's other careers as garden designer and then arts administrator, and to the attentive reader the complex shifts and overlaps of ideologies during his lifetime are clear enough. But the political contexts of his work and its reception are not clarified. The fact is that the underplaying of some of the contexts of the 'futures and ruins' which are the subject of this study serves to indicate where research should now go. Anticipated ruins in literature should one day be given due weight, and not just in French literature, but in English and German as well. After all it was that colourful

aristocrat and very minor poet, the 'wicked Lord Lyttelton', who as early as 1780 has a future American tourist learn that the ruin of London took place:


what time

The fall of public credit, that had long
 Totter'd upon her airy base, involv'd
 In sudden and promiscuous ruin, all
 The great commercial world.¹

Chance, credit and ruin were international phenomena, and no age is better prepared to appreciate them than our own.

Futures and Ruins is enlightening and Dubin's account of Robert's life and works is convincing. Perhaps she overplays the completeness of a swing from fatalistic thinking and superstition to more modern, quasi-scientific models. There is plenty of evidence that the so-called 'stadial' view of history persisted throughout this period and beyond. This view, which is a framework for much history in the century, including Gibbon's and Volney's, was a secularisation of the causes traditionally attributed to a deity. We are indeed teetering on the brink of modernity, but at the same time disasters continue to resonate with Old Testament notes of sin and punishment. The author's progressive model of intellectual history takes us onwards a little too smoothly, although it would be an overstatement to say that the French Revolution is invisible for much of Dubin's account. We all know it is there. We recognise dates and names as profoundly significant in its progress. Dubin, however, stands back and refuses to let the Revolution determine the elements of her story. Even if the effect is a trifle disconcerting, she is perhaps wise in her caution. A fuller evocation of the Revolution could completely swamp the story she has to tell. Yet I think we could ask for a little more, and must perhaps lay the blame in part on academic tradition and publishing conventions. Volney's *The Ruins: or Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires*, quoted in a rather late American translation, provides an epigraph for the Introduction, without any note as to the date or the significance of the original French work of 1791, a book Thomas Jefferson found so important that he immediately translated much of it. It will be said that one does not give full scholarly attention to an epigraph or to a literary quotation in a work of fine art history. Yet why should that be? Admittedly it is not always very important that an epigraph should be fully identified, but Volney is a vital part of the context. Unfortunately the same lack of exact information about the historical moment under examination recurs throughout the book. The author cannot be suspected of not knowing her history, but the reader, not carrying a mental timeline of the Revolution and its aftermath may need some reminders. We wait until page 117 for a more explicit recognition of the place of the Revolution in this story, yet there is still one paragraph on page 129 which mentions two versions of an argument from 1788 and 1790 without mentioning that 1789 falls between those dates. Perhaps the date is totally unimportant in this context, but the reader should be told as much.

Those of us raised in an age in which politics was deemed to be a large determinant of culture are surprised not to be told about one of the important power relations in the art of ruins until very near the end of the book, when we learn at last that predicting the ruin of a ruler's buildings was a form of compliment, since foreseeing a good future ruin reflected grandeur or nobility on the present. Perhaps we shy away from this explanation because it was a favourite of Hitler's architect, Albert Speer. By not taking it in hand early on, Dubin leaves the impression that this view originated with Robert and some of his associates, although William Chamber's 'Projected Mausoleum for Frederick, Prince of Wales Viewed as a Ruin' of 1751 shows that it was already established practice. There is of course a reluctance in French- and English-language critical traditions to quote each other, and the intertwining of London and Paris in politics, economics and the arts has only just become a recognised subject. Now there is a flowering of interest in the links. Future ruins, as well as the fashion for ruins in gardens, are recognised as crossing back and forth across the Channel, as too did perceptions of urbanism, and economic theories, particularly of trade, credit and banking. Proposals to enable ocean-going ships to reach Paris are now recognised as attempts to rectify the one matter in which, to French eyes, Paris might be thought inferior to London. Indeed, although retrospect and aesthetic judgment make us associate the opening up of medieval city centres with Parisian developments from the mid-eighteenth to the early twentieth century, the example of London was frequently cited in France at the time—a case of an early English start leading to a less than memorable conclusion, perhaps.

All these things narrow Dubin's analysis a little, discrediting nothing, but leaving the reader wishing the book could be filled out a little to embrace more context. Overall, we are given a full and very satisfying account of Robert's ruin pictures—better than any earlier treatment in either French or English—and undoubtedly the best source of information in English on the subject. The scholarship is detailed and accurate, so that Hubert Robert may from now on assume a more important role in our perception of his age, to measure up to the enthusiasm museum curators have always evinced for his canvases. 

NOTES

1. 'The State of England, in the Year 2199', in *Poems by the Late Thomas Lord Lyttelton. To Which is Added a Sketch of His Lordship's Character* (London: G. Kearsley, 1780), pp. 7–16 (pp. 9–10).

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