Freya Johnston and Matthew Bevis (eds), *Thomas Love Peacock* Crotchet Castle. Pp. cxxii + 328 (The Cambridge Edition of the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. £79.99 (ISBN 978 1 107 93972 5).

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Nicholas A. Joukovsky (ed.), *Thomas Love Peacock* Nightmare Abbey. Pp. cxlii + 297 (The Cambridge Edition of the Novels of Thomas Love Peacock). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. £84.99 (ISBN 978 1 107 03186 9).

The idiosyncratic joy of Thomas Love Peacock’s works is highlighted within wonderfully readable scholarly introductions from, Nicholas A. Joukovsky who edits *Nightmare Abbey,* and, Freya Johnston and Matthew Bevis in their edition of *Crotchet Castle.* Although Peacock’s enduringly popular novels have remained in print through low-cost paperbacks from World’s Classics, Pan, and Wordsworth Editions, to name a few,these new editions are the first thoroughly edited and annotated imprints of Peacock since the Halliford Edition of the *Works,* edited between 1924 and 1934 by H.F.B. Brett-Smith and C.E. Jones for Constable.

Peacock’s works contain, Nora Crook and Derek Guiton state, ‘references which are as inaccessible to the common reader as medieval graffiti’ (*Shelley’s Venomed Melody,* 1986, p.13). Nevertheless, Peacock stated that his *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), was written to ‘elicit a laugh’ out of the ‘lantern jaws’ which held ‘the darkness and misanthropy of modern literature’. It worked brilliantly as Mary Russell Mitford enthused:

Nightmare Abbey is the most sunshiny book I have met with this many a day. It is a very clever attack upon mystical metaphysics & misanthropical poetry (Deuce take Mr Peacock for putting me to hard words!) and knocks them both completely down in the persons of my poor dear Friend Mr Coleridge (alias Mr Flosky) & Lord Byron—not only knocks them down but dances on them being down […] This book has another great merit too. It is short. (Letter to Mary Webb, 10 January 1819)

Percy Shelley, in despair after the death of his son William in June 1819, perhaps gave the book its greatest compliment, writing two weeks later: ‘Nightmare Abbey though no cure is a palliative. […] I am delighted with Nightmare Abbey. I think Scythrop a character admirably conceived’ (xciii). Peacock, like another East India Company employee, Charles Lamb, obviously had a genius for friendship and conviviality.

Joukovskycites *Nightmare Abbey* as a ‘critique of Romanticism’ (xcix). The phrase was applied by Humphrey House and later used by Marilyn Butler for a chapter title in her *Peacock Displayed* (1980)*.* Joukovsky has Peacock’s satire centring on ‘two distinct groups of representative works’. The first is *Sturm and Drang*—German texts ‘provide the basis for Scythrop’s “passion for reforming the world”’ (cii). However, Peacock’s ‘primary targets […]are selected from the recent poetry, fiction and nonfiction prose of influential English writers, most notably Godwin, Byron and Coleridge’ (cvi). Joukovsky discovers the basis of Peacock’s artistic critique on an artefact, ‘a small scrap of paper with no indication of date or context’, which states that the ‘whole of the perversions of intellect are founded on the idea that excitement is happiness’(cxi). In this note, which the editor reckons is from the 1820s, Peacock states that he is against keeping ‘feelings & imagination […] perpetually on the stretch’, a practice that his Age finds ‘the most pleasurable state of intellectual existence’(cxi). Joukovsky reads this as ‘an endorsement of the Epicurean goal of *alaraxia*, or tranquillity—a frame of mind that is decidedly antithetical to any sort of Romantic excess, be it extreme enthusiasm or extreme despair’ (cxi). That sounds like a rejection of the Sublime and possibly self-protection was at work with Peacock. Joukovsky writes that Peacock suffered an intense period of ‘discussing, and even threatening, suicide, especially during the years 1811-15’ (cxviii). Suicide, in the works of Goethe, Byron, Godwin and Coleridge, can at times be an option for characters. Perhaps, for Peacock, the notion is just too dangerous for anyone afflicted by suicide ideation, and he instead focussed on comedy to throw the mind in a contrary direction.

Peacock’s sixth novel, *Crotchet Castle* (1831)*,* was written during a period of crisis write Matthew Bevis and Freya Johnston: ‘Test and Corporation Act repeals; Catholic emancipation; the reform debates; workers’ protests and rioting; and electoral instability—the 1830 election was the first since 1708 to be followed by the fall of a government’ (cxii). The novel attests to the author’s ability to catch cultural moments:

GOD BLESS my soul, sir!' exclaimed the Reverend Doctor Folliott, bursting, one fine May morning, into the breakfast room at Crotchet Castle, 'I am out of all patience with this march of mind. Here has my house been nearly burned down, by my cook taking it into her head to study hydrostatics, in a sixpenny tract, published by the Steam Intellect Society (Ch. 2).

This is not unlike John Gibson Lockhart’s review of *Endymion*, where Keats is dismissed on the grounds of class: ‘our very footmen compose tragedies, and there is scarcely a superannuated governess in the island that does not leave a roll of lyrics behind her in her bandbox’. However, Peacock, like his friend Shelley, was a great fan of steam power and had been working on the use of ‘Steam Navigation’ to India and Europe. Peacock’s family cite Peacock as the ‘first man to say that iron could float’(xcv). For Peacock, fast steam navigation technology offered ‘government … a new arm of great and irresistible power’. (xcv) Furthermore, Peacock supervised the design, construction and fitting of the first ships to steam all the way to India.

Marilyn Butler states that *Crotchet Castle* is Peacock’s ‘quintessential book, with something in it of all the others’, and is the ‘most topical and densely-packed of the satires’. Butler sees the target being ‘the rich governing classes, landed and commercial, and their new philosophy of wealth—the practice and theory of materialism, seen from the viewpoint of a humanist’ (lxxxiv). The editors have Peacock’s comedy arriving from two major classical sources: Petronius’s *Satyricon* and the plays of Aristophanes. One funny story in *Crochet Castle* goes: ‘a Scotchman returning home, after some years’ residence in England, being asked what he thought of the English, answered: “they hanna muckle sense, but they are an unco braw people to live amang;” which would be a very good story, if it were not rendered apocryphal, by the incredible circumstances of the Scotchman going back.’ (6) Peacock exemplifies a British humour that is both jokey and poking.

These essential Cambridge editions have useful introductions with a chronology, and subheadings such as ‘Composition’, ‘Publication’, ‘Reception’, ‘Imitation’ and ‘Afterlife’. References that would have been lost to readers not blessed with a classical education are here for all, such as Peacock’s observation on the character of the nobility. Peacock, sounding like Oscar Wilde, addresses his own set when the Rev. Folliott says ‘there are two great classes of men: those who produce much and consume little; and those who consume much and produce nothing.’ (56) The next line the Reverend delivers, in Greek, is from Aristophanes: ‘How could he not be noble, *given that he knows only how to drink and fuck?’* (56, n. 13). Peacock’s ‘graffiti’ is here for all to read in these magnificent editions.

JOHN GARDNER

Anglia Ruskin University