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Eve Tavor Bannet
University of Oklahoma
Rebecca Bullard
University of Reading

PHILOSOPHICAL CONNECTIONS

Akenside, Neoclassicism, Romanticism

Chris Townsend
Christ’s College, University of Cambridge
Abstract: Neoclassical and Romantic verse cultures are often assumed to sit in an oppositional relationship, with the latter amounting to a hostile reaction against the former. But there are in fact a good number of continuities between the two movements, ones that strike at the heart of the evolution of verse forms in the period. This Element proposes that the mid-eighteenth-century poet Mark Akenside and his hugely influential Pleasures of Imagination represent a case study in the deep connections between Neoclassicism and Romanticism. Akenside’s poem offers a vital illustration of how verse was a rival to philosophy, and promotes a new perspective on philosophic problems of appearance, or how the world ‘seems to be’. What results from this is a poetic form of knowing that foregrounds feeling over fact, that connects Neoclassicism and Romanticism, and that Akenside called the imagination’s ‘pleasures’.

Keywords: Neoclassicism, Romanticism, philosophy, verse, Akenside

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## Contents

Introduction, or ‘The Design’ 1

1 Philosophic Backgrounds: Pope’s *Essay* and Akenside 10

2 ‘Appearances in the World around Us’: Akenside and the Way Things Seem to Be 23

3 ‘There to Read the Transcript of Himself’: Coleridge, Akenside, and the Esemplastic Imagination 36

4 Akenside’s Romanticism: Wordsworth, Keats, and Imaginative Pleasures 47

Conclusion: Things Connected 60

Bibliography 65