

INTRODUCTION

Romantic Cartographies

The three-part structure of this introduction reflects the larger organization of the volume as a whole into three linked and overlapping sections that each represent a wide range of approaches to the cartographic culture of the Romantic period but also reflect on and contribute to each other. Anticipating the structure of the main volume then, Part I of the Introduction is written by Damian Walford Davies; Part II by Julia S. Carlson; and Part III by Sally Bushell.

I Romantic Maps, Romantic Mapping

Two material fold-out maps – deeply embedded and embodied in the literary texts that carry them, and crucially interrelated within a culture of Romantic sociability and disciplinary exchange – offer a way, at the outset of this volume, of triangulating the affordances and effects of Romantic-period cartographic work and Romantic Studies’ own interpretative lenses. A relational reading of these maps helps us to measure the angles, as it were, between mapping theories and practices, modes of envisioning space and place, and the sociocultural field of the Romantic period that are the composite subject of this book.

Both maps are productions of amateurs, published at a moment when the technologies of survey (still fundamentally aligned with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century modes of mensuration) and the professional credentials of the cartographer (which had not fully exorcised aesthetic modes of seeing) were achieving ever-increasing visibility in the form of the national work of the ‘Trigonometrical Survey of England and Wales’ – soon to be known as the Ordnance Survey.¹ The first map, by the art collector and poet George Cumberland, likely engraved by William Blake, is included in Cumberland’s slim volume *An Attempt to Describe Hafod* (1796).² Sketch-like and annotated with the dotted lines of three walks described in the book, the map delineates part of the estate of Thomas

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Johnes, whose aesthetic, agricultural, and economic improvements had, since 1783, created a scintillating, if often sodden, Xanadu in the Cardiganshire uplands of Wales. Designed to ‘unveil [Johnes’s] Elysium’, the text – from the title itself and the gatefold map to the clotted, allusive writing that seeks to chaperone and direct the reader on walks around the estate – testifies to a fundamental anxiety concerning one’s ability to know, articulate, and navigate a place. It is an anxiety explored further in a number of chapters in *Romantic Cartographies*.

No graphic material is reproduced in Cumberland’s book beyond the map (Figure 0.1). Seeking to ‘describe as faithfully as [he] wish[es] to draw’, Cumberland refers to having previously ‘meditated the design of composing a description’ of the area to accompany his drawings. His formulae betray a struggle between a variety of potential modes of representation. It is his map – unprepossessing, sketchy, almost childlike – that becomes preeminent. Anterior to the verbal text, it arrogates all the representational modes between which Cumberland cannot decide. Indeed, his succeeding verbal chorography becomes a merely second-hand and second-order articulation of Hafod’s time-space – an ekphrastic negotiation of the verbal-graphic object of the map itself: ‘The first ramble I should chuse for a stranger would be, to take him down, through the lawn before the house . . . to the river Ystwith; where, instead of passing over the long Alpine bridge, one turns short to the left’ (13). Poets and painters are mentioned during the course of the book, as mediators of Johnes’s super-charged estate, but not the cartographer. Yet it is cartography – amateur, non-trigonometrical, not-to-scale, and no less powerful for that – that commands the reader’s view and step. It is only in the account of the third walk that verbal description asserts itself more robustly than at any other point hitherto – and only at the very moment when the author announces ‘Here we leave the map’ (37). As the chapters in *Romantic Cartographies* show, the generic interrelations and (unstable) hierarchies between ground, map, and language traceable in Cumberland’s work are at the heart of Romanticism’s cartographic cultures.

The second map, also engraved by William Blake, is by a child – a child who had recently died (see Figure 0.2). Appearing a decade after Cumberland’s book, Benjamin Heath Malkin’s *A Father’s Memoirs of his Child* (featuring a frontispiece designed by Blake and engraved by Robert Cromek, in which the dead child ascends to heaven, leaving behind a pair of compass dividers) is dedicated to Thomas Johnes and is thus an uncanny co-text of Cumberland’s attempt to parse Hafod. Malkin recalls how Johnes had urged him to publish his recollections of young Thomas

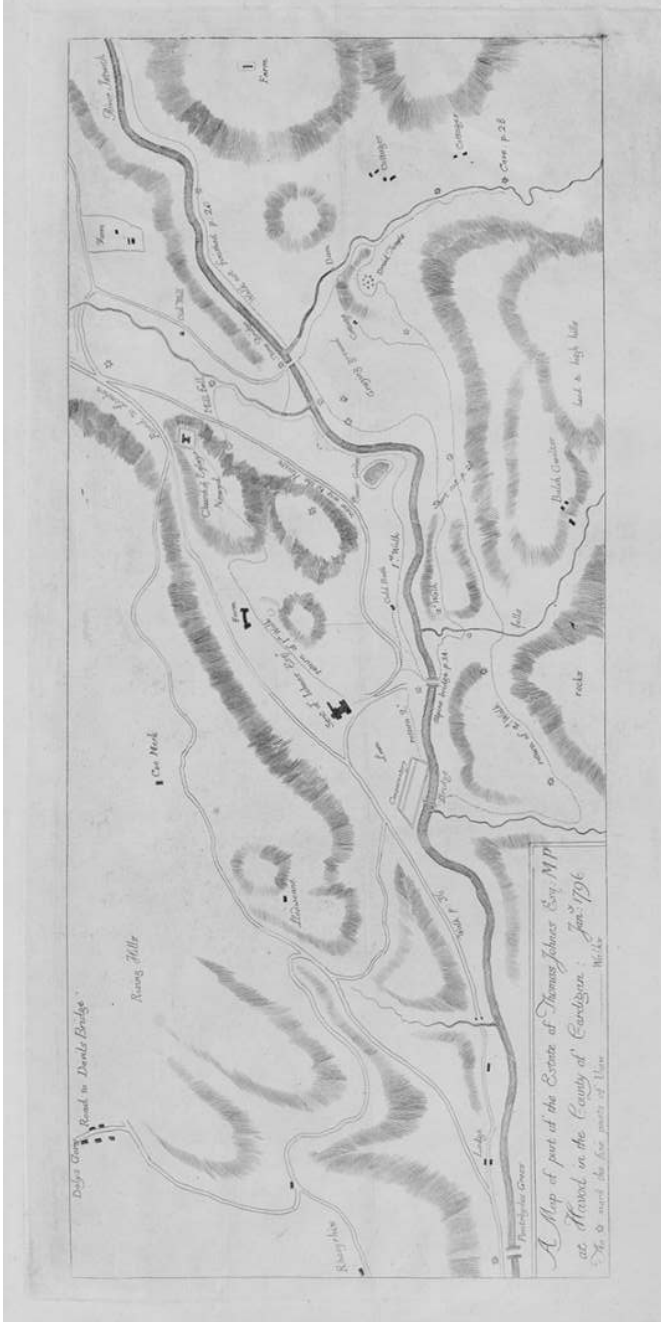


Figure 0.1 George Cumberland, *A Map of Part of the Estate of Thomas Johnes . . . at Hafod* (engraved by William Blake), in George Cumberland, *An Attempt to Describe Hafod* (1796).

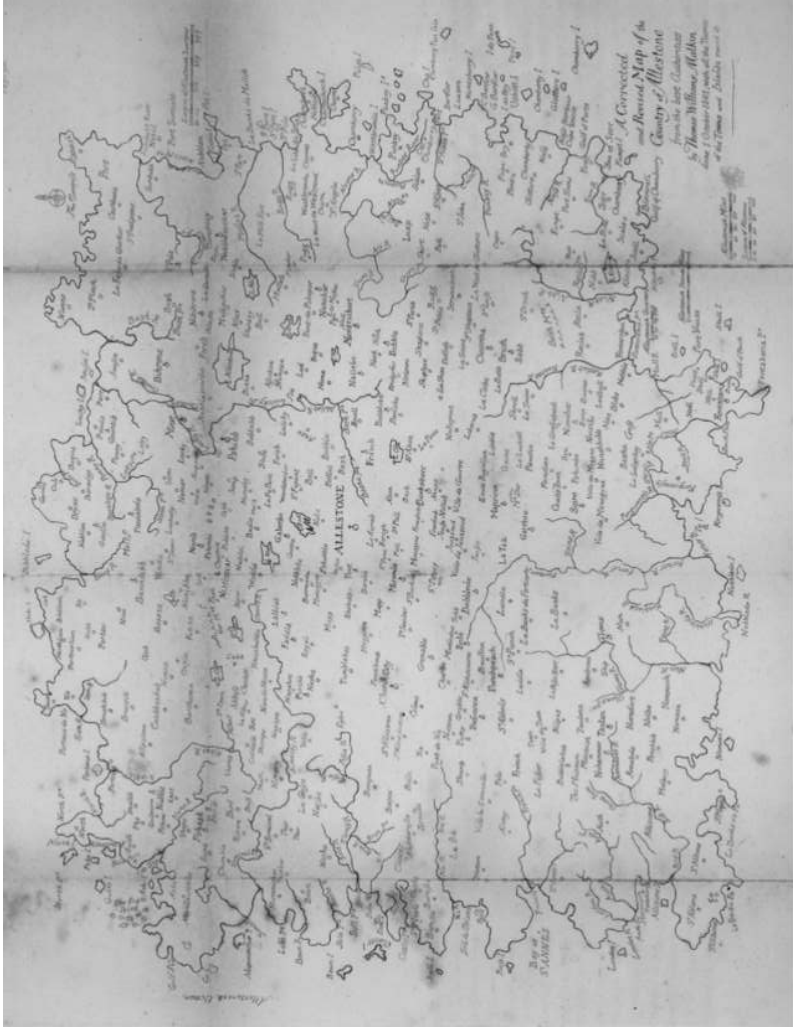


Figure 0.2 *A Corrected and Revised Map of the County of Allstone* by Thomas Williams Malkin. Engraved by William Blake. Cambridge University Library. Keynes, U.4.10.

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Williams Malkin (1795–1802) during conversations the two men had on the very walks at Hafod that had been mapped by Cumberland.

Thomas's letters to his relations are liberally quoted in what is more an evidentiary anthology delineating the 'early progress of a mind, too lately come into the world' than a memoir.³ What emerges is a portrait of a boy learning about geography and about the materiality and rhetoricity of maps, by (dis)assembling 'dissected' – that is, jigsaw – cartography: 'I have a new map. Thomas can put it together – and when Mama takes some counties out, Tom can tell what they all are' (11). Malkin notes that the child 'had acquired a most happy art in copying maps': 'Were one of his performances . . . put into the hands of an engraver', he goes on, 'it would contract a stiffness, destructive of its identity' (31). As we shall see, Romantic-period authors were alive to cartography's own flattening stiffness, the violence it does to the dimensionality of space and the experience of dwelling in it. However, it is precisely to an engraver that Malkin gave an example of his son's cartographic cloning, commissioning Blake to engrave Thomas's *A Corrected and Revised Map of the Country of Allestone from the Best Authorities*, reproduced as a fold-out sheet in the book.

Allestone is an invented island (a type of Hafod), which the child further populated in various literary pieces. For the map, Thomas drew a vaguely rectangular body of land with an island-studded coastline of headlands and bays; topographical features are sidelined in favour of busy toponymic play as Thomas riffs fractally on single names: 'Allastone', 'Allastone I', 'St Alles la Stone'. As Malkin emphasizes:

The map is . . . not so much to be looked at for the neatness of its appearance, and the symmetry of its proportions; but as an exercise of the mind comparing the propriety of its own nascent ideas and inventions, with the performances of adult artists, founded on observation and authority. (95)

Captured here are some of the characteristic frissons – and tensions – of literary-cartographic culture in the Romantic period. Maps are always made in relation to other 'texts' (of which topography is one). The father's comment both contrasts and reconciles 'invention' with 'observation and authority', imagination with scientism. On the subject of the boy's map, Malkin goes on to quote Blake – no friend (or so we have come to believe) of the *esprit géométrique* and the mensurative parcelling out of space on which geodesy depends. For Blake, it has the 'character of the firm and determinate', bespeaking 'a strong imagination, a clear idea, and a determinate vision of things in [the child's] own mind' (34). Though Thomas's map is of course

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of an imagined kingdom and more picture than map, Blake's assessment hints at an awareness of the ways in which even the increasingly institutionalized science of cartography (the word had to wait until the 1820s to be coined) was a creative as well as a critical act. Further, Malkin's use of the word 'symmetry' uncannily links the child's cartography with Blake's 'The Tyger', which is reproduced in full in the book's prefatory section, dedicated to Thomas Johnes (xxxix–xl). The geometric principles of the boy's pseudo-scale map enter into a complex relation with the sublime inscape of Blake's creature, Blake's graphic-verbal texts and his infernal method of relief etching, together with the landscape symmetries (and cultivated irregularities) sought by Thomas Johnes at Hafod. Thomas's map of Allestone is also available to be read as cartographic parody (other place names include 'Mapp', 'Shite' and the obviously windblown 'Horte fart') – an ontology in which cartography itself is implicated in view of its distorting burlesque of landscape. Scrutinizing such multi-genre and multimodal forms of Romantic-period cartography is one of the principal aims of Parts I and II of the present volume.

What makes the imbrication of literature and cartography in the Romantic period such a layered field is the transitional and contingent nature of cartography itself at this time. While the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw the further professionalization and institutionalization of cartography as a national project in a European context (enabled by technological advances and the expectations of an increasingly cartographically literate audience for whose technical needs maps were produced), Romantic-period mapping remained porously situated alongside established traditions of topographical representation. The implied cartographic positivism of the uniform scale map remained in creative dialogue not only with pictorial traditions of landscape painting, bird's-eye views, picturesque prospects, estate plans, and the city views of county histories but also with debates concerning ways of 'envisioning' and inscribing landscape, practical projects of landscape 'improvement' and possession, and phenomenologies of local attachment and national identity. John Barrell, Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels, among others, have enabled us to recognize the sociopolitical meanings of these traditions.⁴

The spatial turn in the humanities that began in earnest in the 1980s and 1990s, which marked the interpenetration of cultural geography and social theory, and which is still in the process of being theorized within new technological paradigms, prompted the deconstruction of the map as a valuative cultural actor. That post-structuralist recalibration of cartography was coterminous with the forging of various modalities of Romantic

New Historicism whose materialist commitments embedded the Romantic literary text in wider cultural practices and geographies, and whose specifically deconstructionist bent defamiliarized texts, allowing us to see them as contingent and occlusive performances. The hierarchical and rhetorical distinctions between maps and texts now levelled, the Romantic-period map entered into a new relation to the Romantic-period literary text, whose mapmindedness – its adjacency to cartographic texts and its performance of cartographic ‘work’ – could now be explored within a conceptualized frame.⁵

The past two decades have witnessed the rise of an increasingly stringently theorized ‘literary geography’ or ‘geography of literature’ committed to exploring the ways in which the literary text is produced by, processes, and in turn inflects geographical knowledge and ‘forms of thinking and feeling about space’.⁶ Its more nuanced forms remain sensitive to the distinctive contours of the literary text by focusing on the ways in which its form is conditioned by the author’s (and reader’s) emplaced position. Comparatively early on, the spatialization of the literary text in Romantic literary geography took a specifically cartographic turn, as New Historicism’s catholic breadth of context was deployed to reveal the embeddedness of the literary work within wider networks. The national project of the Ordnance Survey – mapped anew by Rachel Hewitt in 2010 in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European cultures of science, technology, and national identity (and modes of seeing and feeling) – together with the poetry of William Wordsworth and John Clare featured prominently in this project. Crucially, this critical mapping went beyond the historicization of literature in the context of related disciplines and domains of print; beyond an analysis of cartography’s intimate relation to topographical writing, the tour, aesthetic theory and the graphic arts; and beyond a focus on the place of maps in the political culture and imaginative literature of the age. It certainly sought to go beyond the fundamentally quantitative ‘extension’-views and spatial abstractions of Franco Moretti’s ‘distance reading’ model.⁷ The project – a nascent critical Romantic Cartography – went further by seeking to articulate Romantic-period experiences of and with maps, revealing how literary activity deployed maps and mapping as a heuristic and how literary texts themselves performed recognizably cartographic moves. Crucially, Romantic Studies saw fit to announce the viability of ‘cartographic readings’ that re-encountered the literature and culture of the period.⁸

The four essays in Part I of *Romantic Cartographies* are concerned with the ways in which the Romantic period sought to understand itself

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cartographically and how it mapped itself conceptually as well as technologically. Specific examples of material cartography are considered in the context of the cultural networks and economies in which maps (as practical tools, commercial products, and agents of commemoration and political commentary) circulated. A portrait emerges of the interpenetration of cartography, literature, tourism, art, antiquarianism, historiography, science, sociological analysis, and quantitative data-gathering, with each element both reinforcing and critiquing the others. While Britain and British mapping projects are the primary focus of Part I – as in the volume as a whole – this is so always (necessarily) in relation to global mapping enterprises and coordinates. Indeed, the volume begins both outside and within the borders of ‘Britain’s’ mapping.

It is the imbrication of cartography and the natural history of Canada that concerns Alan Bewell in the first chapter. Again, the human and cultural networks behind the material reality of a map are revealed. Also highlighted, with detailed attention to the design and paratextual embellishment of four specific maps, are the ways in which imperial cartography elides indigenous populations and registers the natural environment in ways that emphasize colonial possession of the land while servicing an appetite for multidisciplinary knowledge. Reading his chosen maps of the North American North-West in terms of the graphic separation of cartography and natural history and their ‘imperial alliance’, Bewell emphasizes the palimpsestic nature of each venture. He ends by reminding us of the need to recover – while we can – the distinctiveness of that which existed before maps rendered them invisible.

Developing her work on the history and cultural capital of the Ordnance Survey – formally established in June 1791, though indebted to decades of British and continental surveying practice and theory – in Chapter 2 Rachel Hewitt focuses on literary constructions of the figure of the Survey’s director, William Mudge. Identifying the cultural, imaginative and organizational conditions that allowed cultural alidades to be focused on Mudge in the period 1798–1820, Hewitt – like Bewell, as well as Stephen Daniels in the succeeding chapter – reveals the networks of people, ideas and organizations on which cartographic ventures relied. As empirical observer, capable of reconciling diversity in unity by virtue of his oversight of the Survey’s unified scale map of a ‘*united* kingdom’, Mudge is seen to take on the role of ideal ‘national commentator’ in the literary imagination. Hewitt argues that, at this particular moment, literary representations of Mudge triangulate with changing public conceptions of professional

knowledge, the proximity of military and civilian cultures, and discussions of national character and cohesiveness.

Stephen Daniels's Chapter 3 reveals complex ecologies of maps, texts, patrons, and publishers in a commercial context, focusing on the topographical-historical 'delineations' of counties of England and Wales begun in 1801 by John Britton and Edward Wedlake Brayley and on the cartographic sister-project *The British Atlas*. Daniels reveals the practical challenges of such a multi-author, interdisciplinary venture, offering a portrait of a sociable (and unsociable) effort involving the commissioning of artists and engravers, historical research, fieldwork, and networks of correspondence. Daniels brings out the problematic plenitude and uneasy currency (in all senses) of these projects, which were invested in conflicted ways in constructions of industrial modernity, the celebration of a pre-industrial past, the performance of civic virtue, the articulation of county and national identities, and the recording of personal debt.

Anticipating the concerns of Part II, Damian Walford Davies focuses in Chapter 4 on a 1798 example of cartographic commemoration by an otherwise unknown local land surveyor, Thomas Propert. Walford Davies offers a historicist-ekphrastic reading of this verbal-graphic text, which maps and narrativizes the *descente* by French troops on the coast of Pembrokeshire in February 1797 (the last invasion of mainland Britain). Again, on display are the paradoxes, anxieties, and generic miscibility of the cartographic project. Taking Propert's map as a test case in (the limits of) historicized literary-cartographic reading, Walford Davies argues that the map is equally committed to the values of scientific mensuration and those of distortion, caricature, and the grotesque. A text of multiple laminations and unresolved cultural conflations, the map is recursive, the tense traffic between caricature and cartography deepened by the range of ideological positions articulated by its graphic codes.

II Cartographic Encounters

We have learned to read the official, state-supported maps and surveys of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as ideological inscriptions conveying attitudes about the place and populations being mapped; about the cartographic images themselves (that they are disinterested representations of spatial and ontological truth); and about their makers (that they possess epistemological, cultural, and political authority). Maps are the construct of 'a gaze', Matthew Edney argues in his history of the cartographic making of British India, 'a concerted observation, that is always appropriative, domineering, and empowered' – and had real effects in British engagement

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with the subcontinent.⁹ This gaze is an aspect of the ‘autonomous individual ego’ described by Jonathan Crary as a subject-effect of the epistemological paradigm of the camera obscura.¹⁰ During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, rationalist and empiricist philosophers construed the camera as a model both of vision and of how visual observation ‘leads to truthful inferences about the world’ (29). The model depended on a structural analogy between the human visual apparatus and the camera, with its eye-like aperture through which images are projected on the walls of the mind-like inner chamber. The camera’s modelling of observational truth relied on its strict Cartesian spatial delimitation between interior and exterior and its ‘decorporealization’ of vision; the device ‘sunder[ed] the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer’, who understood the objects of the external world only as they appeared as images to be contemplated within the space of reason (39). In Crary’s analysis, Vermeer’s portraits of *The Astronomer* (1688) and *The Geographer* (1668–9) (Figure 0.3) situate maps within the ‘optical regime’ modelled by the camera obscura (37). The one-windowed interiors in which the pictured



Figure 0.3 Jan Vermeer Van Delft, *The Geographer* (1688–9). Städel Museum,
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