

ART, SCIENCE, AND THE BODY IN EARLY ROMANTICISM

Can we really trust the things our bodies tell us about the world? This book reveals how deeply intertwined cultural practices of art and science questioned the authority of the human body in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Focusing on Henry Fuseli, Anne-Louis Girodet, and Philippe de Loutherbourg, it argues that Romantic artworks participated in a widespread crisis concerning the body as a source of reliable scientific knowledge. Rarely discussed sources and new archival material illuminate how artists drew upon contemporary sciences and inverted them, undermining their founding empiricist principles. The result is an alternative history of Romantic visual culture that is deeply embroiled in controversies around electricity, mesmerism, physiognomy, and other popular sciences. This volume reorients conventional accounts of Romanticism and some of its most important artworks, while also putting forward a new model for the kinds of questions that we can ask about them.

STEPHANIE O'ROURKE is a senior lecturer in Art History at the University of St Andrews.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-316-51902-8 — Art, Science, and the Body in Early Romanticism
Stephanie O'Rourke
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

Founding Editor
Marilyn Butler, University of Oxford

General Editor
James Chandler, University of Chicago

Editorial Board
John Barrell, University of York
Paul Hamilton, University of London
Mary Jacobus, University of Cambridge
Claudia Johnson, Princeton University
Alan Liu, University of California, Santa Barbara
Deidre Lynch, Harvard University
Jerome McGann, University of Virginia
David Simpson, University of California, Davis

This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s, a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those 'great national events' that were 'almost daily taking place': the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad, and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion, and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; and poetic form, content, and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of commentary or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of literature and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge University Press, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

See the end of the book for a complete list of published titles.

ART, SCIENCE, AND THE
BODY IN EARLY
ROMANTICISM

STEPHANIE O'ROURKE

University of St Andrews, Scotland



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-51902-8 — Art, Science, and the Body in Early Romanticism
 Stephanie O'Rourke
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
 New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781316519028

DOI: 10.1017/9781009004510

© Cambridge University Press 2022

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2022

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: O'Rourke, Stephanie, 1986– author.

TITLE: Art, science and the body in early Romanticism / Stephanie O'Rourke, University of St Andrews, Scotland.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 2021. | Series: Cambridge studies in Romanticism | Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2021038875 | ISBN 9781316519028 (hardback) | ISBN 9781009001267 (paperback) | ISBN 9781009004510 (ebook)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Art and science – Europe – History. | Romanticism in art. | Human body (Philosophy) – Europe – History. | Science – Social aspects – Europe – History. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / European / English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh

CLASSIFICATION: LCC N72.S3 O77 2021 | DDC 700.1/05–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021038875>

ISBN 978-1-316-51902-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
Introduction: Bodies of Knowledge	1
1 De Louthembourg's Mesmeric Effects	22
2 Fuseli's Physiognomic Impressions	60
3 Girodet's Electric Shocks	104
4 Self-Evidence on the Scaffold	151
<i>Notes</i>	182
<i>Bibliography</i>	221
<i>Index</i>	248

Figures

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------|
| 0.1 | François Boucher, <i>Academic Study of a Reclining Male Nude</i> , 1745–1755, chalk on laid paper. The Art Institute of Chicago. | page 8 |
| 0.2 | Reinier Vinkeles, <i>The Felix Meritis Society: The Physics Hall</i> , 1801, etching and engraving. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 12 |
| 1.1 | Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, <i>A Philosopher in a Moonlit Churchyard</i> , 1790, oil on canvas. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1974.3.4. | 23 |
| 1.2 | Anon. [<i>Mesmer Magnetizing a Patient</i>], 1784, engraving. | 28 |
| 1.3 | Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, <i>The Falls of the Rhine at Schaffhausen</i> , 1788, oil on canvas. Victoria and Albert Museum. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 37 |
| 1.4 | William Dent, <i>Billy's Gouty Visit, or a Peep at Hammersmith</i> , 1789, etching. British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum. | 42 |
| 1.5 | Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, <i>Defeat of the Spanish Armada, 8 August 1588</i> , 1796, oil on canvas. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 46 |
| 1.6 | Philippe-Jacques de Loutherbourg, <i>An Avalanche in the Alps</i> , 1803, oil on canvas. Tate Britain. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 54 |
| 2.1 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Thor Battering the Midgard Serpent</i> , 1790, oil on canvas. Royal Academy of Arts, London. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 61 |
| 2.2 | Thomas Holloway after Henry Fuseli, <i>Satan</i> , from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), 285. | 71 |
| 2.3 | Thomas Holloway after Henry Fuseli, <i>Martha Hess</i> , from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), 314. | 72 |

List of Figures

vii

- | | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 2.4 | Thomas Holloway, <i>Caricature of Lord Anson</i> , from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), opposite 112. | 77 |
| 2.5 | Anonymous portrait, from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), 270. | 78 |
| 2.6 | Thomas Holloway after Henry Fuseli, <i>Four Heads from Dante's Inferno</i> , from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), 290. | 79 |
| 2.7 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Head of a Damned Soul from Dante's "Inferno" (recto)</i> , 1770–1778, oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago. | 80 |
| 2.8 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Head of a Damned Soul from Dante's "Inferno" (verso)</i> , 1770–1778, oil on canvas. Art Institute of Chicago. | 81 |
| 2.9 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Achilles Grasping at the Shade of Patroclus</i> , 1803, oil on canvas. Kunsthau Zürich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 83 |
| 2.10 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Satanic Call to Beelzebub in Hell</i> , 1802, oil on canvas. Kunsthau Zürich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 85 |
| 2.11 | Thomas Lawrence, <i>Satan Summoning His Legions</i> , 1796–1797, oil on canvas. Royal Academy of Arts, London. © Photo: Royal Academy of Arts, London. Photographer: Marcus Leith. | 86 |
| 2.12 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Achilles Sacrifices His Hair on the Funeral Pyre of Patroclus</i> , 1800, oil and watercolor on paper. Kunsthau Zürich. © Kunsthau Zürich, Collection of Prints and Drawings, 1916. | 88 |
| 2.13 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Thetis Mourning the Body of Achilles</i> , 1780, wash and graphite on paper. The Art Institute of Chicago. | 90 |
| 2.14 | Henry Fuseli, <i>The Nightmare</i> , 1781, oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts. USA Founders Society Purchase with funds from Mr. and Mrs. Bert L. Smokler and Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence A. Fleischman/Bridgeman Images. | 95 |
| 2.15 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Mad Kate</i> , 1806–1807, oil on canvas. Goethemuseum, Frankfurt. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 97 |
| 2.16 | Thomas Holloway after Henry Fuseli, <i>The Witch of Endor</i> , from <i>Essays on Physiognomy</i> , trans. Henry Hunter, vol. 2 (London: John Murray, 1789–1798), 289. | 99 |
| 3.1 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Pygmalion and Galatea</i> , 1819, oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Thierry Le Mage. | 105 |
| 3.2 | Benjamin West, <i>Benjamin Franklin Drawing Electricity from the Sky</i> , c.1816, oil on slate. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 107 |

- | | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 3.3 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Sleep of Endymion</i> , Salon of 1793, oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Angèle Dequier. | 115 |
| 3.4 | R. Brunet after N. le Sueur, frontispiece from Jean-Antoine Nollet, <i>Essay sur l'électricité des corps</i> , 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez les Frères Guerin, 1750). | 121 |
| 3.5 | Plate 4 from Jean-Antoine Nollet, <i>Essay sur l'électricité des corps</i> , 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez les Frères Guerin, 1750). Credit: Wellcome Collection. | 123 |
| 3.6 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Ossian Receiving the Ghosts of the French Heroes</i> , 1802, oil on canvas. Musée national des châteaux de Malmaison et Bois-Préau. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 125 |
| 3.7 | Frontispiece from Étienne-Gaspard Robertson, <i>Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques et anecdotiques du physicien-aéronaute E. G. Robertson</i> , vol. 1 (Paris: Chez l'Auteur, 1831). Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 126 |
| 3.8 | Gobin, plate II from Jean-Antoine Nollet, <i>Leçons de physique expérimentale</i> , vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez les Frères Guerin, 1745–1765). Image: Bibliothèque Diderot de Lyon. | 131 |
| 3.9 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Une scène de Déluge</i> , Salon of 1806 and 1814, oil on canvas. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 134 |
| 3.10 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Déluge</i> , n.d., oil on wood. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Gérard Blot. | 136 |
| 3.11 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, preparatory sketch for <i>Une scène de déluge</i> , crayon on paper. Besançon, musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie (inv. D.2792). Photo © Pierre Guenat. | 137 |
| 3.12 | Detail from Gobin, plate II from Jean-Antoine Nollet, <i>Leçons de physique expérimentale</i> , vol. 6, 2nd ed. (Paris: Chez les Frères Guerin, 1745–1765). Image: Bibliothèque Diderot de Lyon. | 138 |
| 3.13 | Barnabé Augustin de Mailly, <i>Congrès des rois coalisés, ou les tyrans (découronnés)</i> , 1793, engraving. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France. | 141 |
| 3.14 | Jacques-Louis Pérée, <i>L'homme enfin satisfait d'avoir recouvré ses droits</i> , 1794–1795, etching and burin. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France. | 142 |

List of Figures

ix

- | | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 3.15 | François-Marie Isidore Queverdo, <i>La Chûte en masse</i> , c. 1793, colored etching. Musée Carnavalet, Paris. | 143 |
| 3.16 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, detail from <i>Pygmalion and Galatea</i> , 1819, oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais/Thierry Le Mage. | 148 |
| 4.1 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Lady Macbeth Seizing the Daggers</i> (possibly exhibited 1812), oil on canvas. Tate Britain. | 154 |
| 4.2 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Heads of Marquis de Launay, Foulon, and Bertier de Sauvigny</i> , 1789, pencil on paper. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France. Photo © Bibliothèque nationale de France. | 156 |
| 4.3 | Villeneuve, <i>Matière à réflexion pour les jonglers couronnées</i> , 1793, aquatint and etching. Musée Carnavalet, Paris. | 157 |
| 4.4 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, <i>Revolt of Cairo</i> , 1810, oil on canvas. Château de Versailles et de Trianon. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 159 |
| 4.5 | Anne-Louis Girodet Trioson, study for <i>Revolt of Cairo</i> , 1810, charcoal and pastel on paper. Musée de l'Avallonnais Jean Després, Ville d'Avallon. | 161 |
| 4.6 | Detail from Isidore Helman after Charles Monnet, <i>Execution of Louis XVI</i> , 1794, engraving. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 168 |
| 4.7 | Isaac Cruikshank, <i>The Martyr of Equality</i> , 1793, etching. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 170 |
| 4.8 | Henry Fuseli, <i>Kriemhild Shows Hagen the Head of Gunther</i> , c.1805, pencil and watercolor on paper. Kunsthaus Zürich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 171 |
| 4.9 | Philippe-Jacques de Louthembourg, <i>Earl Howe's Victory over the French Fleet</i> , 1795, oil on canvas. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. Image: Wikimedia Commons. | 174 |

Acknowledgments

Few things are more pleasurable than to be indebted to those you admire. It is a genuine privilege to thank some of them here, albeit briefly. My first thanks are due to Jonathan Crary, whose instruction, conversation, and friendship have been simply invaluable. I have also benefited tremendously from the guidance and feedback I received at Columbia University, where this project initially took shape, from Noam Elcott, Stefan Andriopoulos, Branden Joseph, and Anne Higonnet. Several others whose work has been especially formative in my thinking have generously shared their time and their insights over the past several years: Tim Barringer, Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Ann Bermingham, Simon Schaffer, Peter Galison, Caroline Jones, Richard Taws, Mechthild Fend, and Andrei Pop.

A number of friends and colleagues read portions of this text along the way, kindly intervening to prune its tangled prose and bolster its weaker claims: Tina Rivers Ryan, Sarah Schaefer, Susan M. Wager, Anna Hetherington, Trevor Stark, Alex Freer, Avis Bohlen, Susannah Blair, and Esther Chadwick. I owe particular gratitude to Rachel Silveri, an inspiring interlocutor over many years. Art history colleagues at the University of St Andrews offered feedback, support, and time to write when I needed it most: Marika Knowles, Julian Luxford, Catherine Spencer, and Linda Goddard. During this period, I also benefited greatly from the work of three talented research assistants: Aisling Coase, Lizzie Franco, and Lucy Howie. Most recently, Bethany Thomas, James Chandler, Linsey Hague, Cambridge University Press's peer reviewers, and the Cambridge University Press editorial team have done much to greatly improve the manuscript and to help it find its current form. It is thrilling to contribute to a series that has consistently broadened and enriched my understanding of the period addressed in this book.

The archival research upon which this project relies was funded by granting bodies whose support I am most grateful to have received: Social Science Research Council, Yale Center for British Art, Mellon

Acknowledgments

xi

Foundation, and Columbia University. Some of the material from Chapter 3 first appeared as an article in *Art History* (“Girodet’s Galvanized Bodies,” *Art History* 41 no. 5: 868–893), and I am much obliged to the Association of Art History for granting me permission to reproduce it here. The Royal Academy kindly allowed me to use their photograph of Thomas Lawrence’s *Satan Summoning His Legions* (1796–1797) for Figure 2.II. Additionally, I thank the Musée Besançon for permission to reproduce Anne-Louis Girodet’s *Une scène de déluge* (n.d.) on the cover and as Figure 3.II. I also thank the Musée de l’Avalonnais for permission to reproduce Girodet’s study for the *Revolt of Cairo* as Figure 4.5.

No single person has done more to help the project find its way than Sam Rose, in whose debt I happily linger. This book, like so much else that I do, is for Anne O’Rourke (1946–2010).