

SCOTT KRAWCZYK

ROMANTIC LITERARY FAMILIES (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009) xvii + 224 pp.

Reviewed by Felicity James.

This is a thoughtful, measured, and persuasive book – a real contribution to our understanding of Romantic creativity. Scott Krawczyk’s analysis not only taps into recent critical interest in sociable networks and collaborative productions; it also offers new insights into the literary family as the “predominant mediating network for Romantic collaboration” (x). These Romantic literary families – which include the formidable intellectual Aikin clan, those intense orphans William and Dorothy Wordsworth and the Wollstonecraft-Godwin-Shelley circle, as well as the Edgeworths, the Southey, and the Taylors – are deeply aware of their creative, economic, and political power. Indeed, the family, in this formulation, is nothing less than “a nascent corporation” (x). And this corporation, Krawczyk shows, has successfully shaped our view of Romanticism. Juxtaposing subtly different literary family models, Krawczyk not only sheds fascinating light on particular authors, but also calls for a reevaluation of Romantic authorship itself, with “collaborative interaction” at its heart.

This is a timely intervention in Romantic studies for a number of reasons, not least the way it builds on recent scholarship emphasising the central importance of networks of allusion and influence, families and groups, in understanding the period. Sociability is currently a hot topic – the subject of Jeffrey Cox’s 2008 NASSR address, for instance, or Clara Tuite’s and Gillian Russell’s excellent essay collection *Romantic Sociability* (2002). Rather than focussing on the lone bard, critical attention has shifted to his sociable alter ego, busy in the coffee-house, the theatre, the radical meeting or the

Dissenting chapel. Moreover, families like the Aikin-Barbaulds have emerged as central to this sociable, energetic vision of Romanticism, in work by, amongst others, Daniel E. White, whose *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2006) offered a valuable insight into the religious and familial ideals of the Aikins, and Michelle Levy, in her *Family Authorship and Romantic Print Culture* (2008). In different ways, Anne Janowitz and Kathryn Ready have also probed the remarkable intellectual legacy of the Aikin clan, and William McCarthy's splendid new biography, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (2009), which must have emerged just too late for this study, has crowned this recent growth of interest. Krawczyk's lively readings of literary family life are informed by these recent critical perspectives – and further them.

Krawczyk begins by examining two pamphlets released on the same day, March 27, 1790: Anna Letitia Barbauld's *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts*, and her brother John Aikin's *An Address to the Dissidents of England on their Late Defeat*. Carrying reciprocal advertisements, these "sibling pamphlets" speak together, supporting and furthering one another's reformist aims: a striking image of what Krawczyk calls the "mobilization of the family, through writing, in the realm of political action" (2). This co-operative, responsive, reformist model was nothing new for the Aikin family. Krawczyk defines and analyses three stages of their "collaborative career pattern": their Warrington Academy period; their reformist period of activist and educational writing through the closing decades of the eighteenth century; and their "canon formation stage", when they both helped to shape literary taste through their selections of British novels and poetry (3). In all three stages, Krawczyk shows, the works benefit from being read together, and his close readings show how one answers another, how the family dialogue develops and deepens over time. Of course, Krawczyk acknowledges that previous Aikin-Barbauld studies have

already compared the work of brother and sister; but what is new here is fresh detail about the context of their collaborations and unfamiliar examples of it. Instead of focussing on such well-known works as their *Evenings at Home*, Krawczyk turns his attention to a series of lesser-known pamphlets, essays and poems, and reminds us of the flexibility, playfulness, and challenging range of both siblings. John's *Essays on Song-Writing* (1772) and Anna's *Poems* (1773), for instance, form a creative dialogue when read, as here, side by side. Krawczyk reminds us that some readers, like Thomas Cautley of Trinity College, Cambridge, bound the two works together – a material example of the kind of companionable reading encouraged by this study.

Furthermore, this attention to the material experience of the contemporary reader is a characteristic feature of the book, which reproduces numerous advertisements, title pages and end matter from volumes. From *Miscellaneous Pieces* (1792) comes a page advertising works from Barbauld and Aikin; by the time we reach John Aikin's *Vocal Poetry* (1810), the same works appear above a plug for Arthur Aikin's publications, including *The Natural History of the Year. Being an Enlargement of Dr. Aikin's Calendar of Nature*. One can see exactly what Richard Lovell Edgeworth meant when he talked of an "Aikin school": this family model is built in to the very marketing of the work. Informed by studies such as Leonore Davidoff's and Catherine Hall's 1987 classic, *Family Fortunes*, and, in particular, the more recent *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England* (2001) by Naomi Tadmor, Krawczyk posits a model of the literary family which is, essentially, a business, and a highly effective tool for marketing, networking and self-promotion.

As chapter two shows in detail, the Romantic literary family is also an aesthetic, and, to some extents, a protective device. Discussing the Aikins' reluctance to claim

authorship of individual pieces, Krawczyk quotes Samuel Rogers' anecdote about Charles James Fox attempting to praise the collection to John Aikin. "I am greatly pleased with your *Miscellaneous Pieces*, Mr. Aikin," Fox is supposed to have said. But to each essay Fox mentioned Aikin gravely responded, "That [...] is my sister's," until "Fox thought it best to say no more about the book" (30). Later, John's daughter Lucy, jealous for her father's reputation, went to some trouble to attribute particular pieces to him. Despite Lucy's efforts, one of these, *Sir Bertrand, a Fragment*, is still often assigned to Barbault in modern anthologies. Krawczyk suggests that this very confusion is part of the point about the book, springing from the way in which the siblings worked and reinforcing the way in which they sought to elide authorial difference. That "authorial identity remained a secret," he observes, "suggests that the collaborative framework offered a way of keeping the private sphere private, even as a work ventured into the public realm" (30). This collaborative work isn't purely a public front, however; Krawczyk shows how it helped to shape the private relationships of the family, too. One of the most private acts of collaboration he considers is Anna's adoption of John's son; he also explains how the wider family might have supplied comfort and support during the mental illness of Anna's husband Rochemont.

This was, then, a tightly-bound and intensely intimate literary family. But Krawczyk shows that rather than being smugly enclosed, the Aikin family ethos could move outward and help shape the experiences of readers worldwide. One of the fascinating examples he gives in chapter two is Frederick Douglass, who was a thirteen-year-old slave in Baltimore when he bought *The Columbian Orator* for fifty cents. Later crediting this book as a cornerstone of his education, Douglass particularly recalled the impact of "Dialogue between a Master and a Slave." Since this dialogue, where the slave's reasoning with his master results in his "voluntary emancipation", was reprinted

from *Evenings at Home*, Warrington Academy abolitionist rhetoric had found, in Douglass, its “ideal reader” (49). This striking example of transatlantic influence reveals the radical possibilities of Aikin’s and Barbauld’s writing.

As Krawczyk turns his attention to the Wordsworths, we see, too, how these familial readings might shape our view of canonical Romanticism. The brother-sister intimacy of ‘Tintern Abbey’ finds an intriguing parallel in John Aikin’s ‘To Mrs. Barbauld, at Geneva’: two river poems which Krawczyk uses to discuss the different collaborative relationships of creative siblings. In ‘To Mrs. Barbauld’ Anna and John are looking back to a concrete time of shared domestic creativity, whereas William and Dorothy are, in 1798, setting out to create their own ideal, of “sibling, spouse, parent, and friend all rolled into one.” Krawczyk subtly discusses the “passionate energies” of the brother-sister relationship and traces their development. He shows, for example, the ways in which Dorothy’s intense friendship with Jane Pollard may have shaped and underscored her expressions of affection for her brother; the intimacies of that relationship, then, “are in all likelihood far more nuanced than contemporary conceptions can imagine, and therefore persistently elusive to adequate representation” (61). Our understanding of what she and William gave each other is further complicated by the fact that unlike Anna Barbauld, she published nothing in her lifetime. Nevertheless, by analyzing the echoes and allusions that she and her brother shared, Krawczyk does offer some insight into the “poetic vision” of the sibling relationship. Noting that John Worthen has detected the presence of Dorothy behind the ‘Celandine’ poems of 1807, Krawczyk shows the clusters of association with which the Wordsworths might have surrounded this little flower. On the first page of Dorothy’s *Grasmere Journal*, for instance, she comments on finding a yellow “ranunculus”, or lesser celandine; Krawczyk suggests that the term “celandine” actually enters the Wordsworths’ vocabulary when they acquired

and read together William Withering's *An Arrangement of British Plants* in 1801.

Dorothy's botanical inquisitiveness contributed to the Wordsworths' "shared vision of the natural world," argues Krawczyk, and in the 'Celandine' poems, amongst others, William implicitly "pays tribute" to Dorothy as inspiration. Krawczyk then sets the Wordsworths' interest in "the 'starry yellow flower which Mrs. C[larkson] calls pile wort'" alongside the ways in which Charlotte Smith, in 1804, had depicted the "pile-wort" in her poem "The Early Butterfly." This was itself included in a volume which paid homage to Smith's close relationship with her sister, who also contributed verse to the book, setting up an image of sibling conversations across Romantic poetry. Moreover, these different explorations of Romantic sibling relationships, emotional and textual, help to build up a complex image of different collaborative models.

But of course this model of happy collaborative harmony may be subject to many different pressures, from within and without. In his fourth chapter, Krawczyk subtly explores some of those tensions – emotional, financial, social – and how different literary families sought to deal with them and neutralise their threat. Using Tadmor's theory of family models, he suggests two different approaches to the literary family: the "lineage-family" and the "household-family." The first is exemplified by the Aikin-Barbauld circle, passing its literary and intellectual heritage from generation to generation and thus creating what Anne Janowitz has termed "a reputation machine" (in *Repossessing the Romantic Past* (2006)). Krawczyk describes the workings of this machine as the Aikin-Barbauld clan was asked by an equally powerful literary family, the Edgeworths, to consider a joint project, the formation of "a periodical paper, to be written entirely by ladies," in the words of Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Barbauld chafed at the limitations of such a female-only scheme. "Mrs. Hannah More would not write along with you or me," she writes to Maria Edgeworth, "and we should probably

hesitate at joining Miss Hays, or if she were living, Mrs. Godwin." She shrewdly assessed the proposal, lodging particular objections, citing handicaps, and thrashing out the level of her own involvement from the start. Krawczyk's analysis of the Edgeworth-Barbauld correspondence demonstrates that this collaborative project was seen on both sides as a commercial "merger" of two powerful groups in the literary industry (99). Moreover, Barbauld's sprightly responses to the competitive edge which emerges in Richard Edgeworth's letters display what Krawczyk terms an "alternative language of female business leadership", and show how she thinks carefully and practically about the nature of creative collaboration (105). By declining in the end to collaborate, she and her brother preserved the cohesion of what Krawczyk calls their "lineage-family".

By contrast, Krawczyk shows, the Taylors of Ongar construct a "house-hold family model of incorporation" (107). Their volume *The Associate Minstrels* (1810), for instance, involves contributions from two families, and two generations. These poems -- written to mourn for friends and family, to celebrate birthdays and friendships, and written by sisters to sisters, in what Krawczyk terms "a celebration, too, of poetic sisterhood" -- show a larger literary community in action. These two examples of the Aikin-Barbaulds and the Taylors offer, then, two different approaches, but both imagine a business-like but non-competitive model of literary collaboration.

Krawczyk then applies these two models to one of the most famous Romantic collaborations: the partnership of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But, instead of highlighting the *annus mirabilis* of 1798, with its glorious, fervent months of Quantock walks and mutual idealism, he examines some of the previous years. Focussing first on Coleridge, he views his work in the "context of literary-familial incorporation, first with the Pantisocratic literary family and then with the Wordsworths" (97). Placing

Coleridge's literary development in this larger context allows us to look again at the formative work of 1794-5 – something, coincidentally, which David Fairer has also tackled in his similarly nuanced study *Organising Poetry: The Coleridge Circle, 1790-1798*, out just the month before Krawczyk's. Both authors show how the fleeting, brilliant promise of the Pantisocratic scheme should not be filed under youthful folly, but instead considered as something more significant. Pantisocracy is part of Coleridge's perpetual quest for the perfect domestic-literary intimacy. Set alongside the strategies of the Aikins and the Taylors, we can also see how it might reflect Coleridge's desire to build up his own literary family, an aim which then goes on to inform his relationship with the Wordsworths. The similarities between these two familial collaborations have perhaps been obscured by the subsequent strife between the older, more established Aikin-Barbauld circle and the younger Romantics, particularly Coleridge, Lamb, and Southey, whose cocky chauvinism about "Mrs Bare-bald" became distinctly noxious as the 1800s wore on. As Krawczyk puts it, the "battle-lines of an intergenerational agon" were being drawn (146).

He closes, however, with a portrait of another intergenerational literary family, the Godwin-Wollstonecraft-Shelley circle, which he sees in some ways as bringing together different ideals. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and P. B. Shelley, intellectual "son" of *Political Justice*, "pursued the fulfilment of that Dissenting model of education enjoyed by the Aikins and looked forward to in girlhood by Dorothy Wordsworth"; furthermore, their relationship was both intellectually and erotically satisfying, in a way which Coleridge, in love with the Pantisocratic scheme rather than Sara Fricker, had never been able to enjoy. Nevertheless, all these different literary families continue to inform our view of Romanticism, and Krawczyk's book offers a convincing argument to

support his suggestion that this is a period when the *genius familiae* replaced the *genius loci*.

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