Foreword: Parody and Romantic Ideology
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"Parody is about power," write David Kent and D. R. Ewen, the editors of this volume. In our postmodern age, awash in fin de siècle irremiss, this may come as no surprise. Today's oppositional writers and theorists—be they postcolonial, feminist, gay, or any other—argue that mimicry and parody are the complex weapons of both the oppressor and the oppressed. But the parodies gathered in this collection are those of an earlier time, of the Romantic period of English literature, a time we usually think of as being well before these particular issues moved to the forefront of critical discussions. Yet, in these parodies, the variety of modes and forms, the diversity of both targets and vehicles, and the range of inferred motivations or ethos all challenge this inimical categorizing, even as they challenge any reductive notions we might have of a monolithic thing called Romantic literary discourse—and its politics.

To talk of power in this particular context is not merely to note that both liberals and conservatives at this time deployed parodic barbs, often against the same targets (alas, poet Southey). To talk of power is also to point to two extremes, two opposing poles of response, because early nineteenth-century parody is clearly used here as a tool of both reaction and reform. The long tradition of invoking parody as a repressive, conservative force used to ridicule and thus control innovation, perceived excess and aberration is well represented in this extensive collection; but so too is the equally powerful and historically validated use of parody as a form of oppositional discourse against a dominant cultural, social, or political force. After all, if parody in the Romantic period had had no teeth, so to speak, why then would we have seen the Victorian attempt to trivialize it and thus reduce its power through domestication and institutionalization? The desire to "de-fang" parody may well testify to the fear of its power, a power it shares with humor in general: what is at stake here—in addition to the specific individual issues raised by each parody—is the equation of seriousness with significance that is at the core of much of the ideology of nineteenth-century art.

These Romantic parodies, be they motivated by either reaction or reform, are always complicated beasts—complicated in terms of their intended effect, their function, and even their generic definition. No matter what the political direction of the attacks, parody here is almost always aligned with satire; that
Is to say, parody is the literary shape taken on by social satire. Despite this close and obvious relationship, it is still necessary to insist on the distinction between the two terms. Parody is a genre that is often used as a means of social criticism, while social satire is a form of literary expression that uses humor and irony to challenge authority and conventional social norms.

Some of the most famous parody authors include Jonathan Swift, who wrote "Gulliver's Travels," and Lewis Carroll, who wrote "Alice in Wonderland." These authors used parody to comment on the社会 and political issues of their time.

Parody is often used as a means of social commentary, as it allows authors to critique the status quo in a satirical and often humorous way. It can be used to expose the absurdities of society and to challenge the conventions that govern it.

In conclusion, parody and social satire are closely related genres that are often used to challenge authority and conventional social norms. They are both literary forms that allow authors to express their views on society in a satirical and often humorous way, and they are both important tools for social commentary.
Fully understood. We have to know what is being called up before we can understand the power dynamics at work—whether the motivation inferred is ridicule or reverence. It is a truism of critical thought about both parody and satire that they are forms that “date” quickly, precisely because their comprehension is tied in this manner to very particular literary, historical, social, and political contexts. Although this is undoubtedly the case, the flip side of this would be the argument that many texts have survived into the present simply because they have been parodied. The act of parodying canonizes even as it mimics; it is a gesture of imitation that, however ironically intended, is simultaneously a gesture of legitimation, ensuring some sort of continuance. Nevertheless, in reading parodies of the Romantic period today, we certainly do have to account for the loss of a classically educated readership that could easily recognize allusions and also would likely have practiced the genre, thanks to a tradition of training in the classical art of imitation. But even beyond that, for us today there are going to be gaps: there are specifics—of literary politics, of historical fact, of social practice—that will need for full comprehension and appreciation of the parodies of this period, like any other.

This is where the introductions and endnotes of this collection come in, for they position both texts and authors firmly in these various contexts. In addition they point to the complexities of structural and stylistic functioning within the particular parody and to the relation of parodic vehicle to satiric target. In so doing, they underline the wide range of ethos and modes present and operating within one period, as parodies work subversively from the inside of a single ideology. And what they teach us is that, like any other, the Romantic ideology is rife with contradictions and conflicts that both belie the critical tradition’s often simplifying attempts to model the period’s literature and also testify to the particular and significant aesthetic, social, and political issues at stake in Romanticism. All this—and much enjoyment as well.