

Novel-Poetry: The Shape of the Real and the Problem of Form by Emily Allen and Dino Franco Felluga. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2024. ix, 216 pp. + 3 b/w illus. ISBN 9780198929208. \$100.00.

Emily Allen and Dino Franco Felluga's brilliant book pursues several different lines of argument, each of which crosses a fault line in the field of nineteenth-century literary studies. The book's organizing metaphor is Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit image, which appears as its cover illustration, and as this suggests, its different arguments do not all belong to a single *gestalt* or even a single disciplinary frame; nor do they develop a linear historical narrative.

One of the book's contributions is nonetheless a literary-historical one. In consonance with its project of straddling disciplinary boundaries, the book rejects the treatment of "Romanticism" as a distinct historical era that is normal in nineteenth-century literary studies and argues for the influence of Byron's *Don Juan* (1819-24) on subsequent poetry of the Victorian era. In so doing, Allen and Felluga also reject a Victorian view of Romanticism itself, exemplified by Matthew Arnold, that centres Wordsworth. Byron's unfinished picaresque epic, they argue, offers an improvisational, non-teleological model of narrative that contrasts with the totalizing account of the poet's growth found in Wordsworth's *Prelude* (1850) and "Immortality Ode" (1807) where losses and accidents ultimately receive compensation and appear as shaped by destiny. In Byron's poem, furthermore, the poet is never allowed the retrospective detachment from the action that characterizes the Wordsworthian narrator but is rather entangled in the unfolding narrative and frequently difficult to distinguish from its hapless protagonist.

More below on Wordsworth, who stalks Allen and Felluga's book as ideology personified; *Novel-Poetry's* literary-historical argument is that *Don Juan's* heirs in Victorian poetry are a cluster of verse-novels from the 1850s and '60s. This claim leads to compelling readings of narrative form and of what they term the act-event in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), Arthur Clough's *Amours de Voyage* (1858), and George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862). Each of these poems, the authors show, carries forward different parts of the Byronic legacy; they collectively develop a version of realism that the authors contrast with that of the nineteenth-century novel. Clough's and Meredith's poems emulate *Don Juan's* tragicomedy of manners, set, especially in the case of Clough's *Amours*, in the midst of unfolding historical events whose indeterminate outcome as the action unfolds reflects the uncertain consequences of action and inaction that are the poem's theme. Allen and Felluga view these verse novels as narratives of the Byronic deed (or, in their term, act-event), whose meaning will prove to have been deter-