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Sabbatical Report on *Living Romanticism* project

I was honored to have had spring 2020 as a chance to work on my ongoing book project, *Living Romanticism Dialogic Forms and Contesting Visions in 19th C. British Romantic Poets and 20 Century American Singer Songwriters*. During this leave, I continued to read books and articles about the singer-songwriters I am studying, and working on fleshing out both the writing and the marketing of this book project. Depending on where I can get this book published and to what audience it is aimed, I may drop the term “dialogic forms” from that working title as I want non-academic writers to feel invited into this book. Although it was great to start spring 2020 with time to really think about and work on this project, all things in some ways came to a halt by mid-march. Since the pandemic and its related concerns for individual and family health, my approach to work and writing has changed. However, I still made some good progress.

Perhaps because of the sadness in the air, I think the biggest breakthrough I made in organizing my writing project during this time came with developing a chapter around a term I’ve coined as “precocious sadness.” I had the most post-pandemic success thinking about and drafting this chapter, which I currently plan to have as the third of six chapters. The idea stems from a line in Jackson Browne’s “These Days,” in which he writes, “Please don’t confront me with my failures, I have not forgotten them.” How could Browne have written such a melancholy and knowing line at age 16? Joni Mitchell penned “I’ve looked at life from both sides now” at 23. Tying this “precocious sadness” back to the Romantics leads to a consideration of Keats’ “Ode on Melancholy,” written in his early 20s. “Beauty that must die; / and Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu.” Shelley in “Julian and Maddalo” and Wordsworth in “Resolution and Independence” also address this theme of intense awareness of suffering, regret, and loss, all voiced from writers in their early twenties, or in Wordsworth’s case about writers (Burns, Chatterton) who died too young. “Romantic agony,” as Mario Praz has it? To be sure. But I argue in this chapter that an intense awareness of suffering marks these writers, and this personal sadness is tied to the political frustrations explored in the elegies of Browne, Denver, and Shelley in chapter three, “Romantic Elegies and the Post-Revolutionary moment.” Rethinking what it means for the personal to be political is key to this project.

A key aspect of my work during this sabbatical has been thinking through the marketing of this book project. In my writing, I am striving for a voice that speaks with authority on the subject, but without academic jargon and too much reliance on the theory that does in fact inform the project. In doing research I found a volume put out by Cambridge called *The Cambridge Companion to the Singer-Songwriter* (2016). I had not read that prior to this year, and it is interesting to study how both academic and non-academic writers address the topic as I read this book in February of this year. I’m glad to see that none of the songwriters I am studying are addressed in that volume, nor are ties made to Romanticism and its traditions. John Denver is particularly understudied as a writer, so I am hoping to market this book to his many life-long fans, to address the way he is unique upon pop artists in framing so much of his work about nature – in this way his writing ties directly back to the Romantics. I connected with one of Joni Mitchell’s biographers (Malka Marom) via email and she gave me advice on the project and also on how to connect with annual symposiums on Mitchell’s work. There is no doubt

that much scholarly attention, in both the disciplines of Music and Literature, is developing around Mitchell's work. My sabbatical research on the other two writers reveals that they need and deserve more scholarly and literary attention as writers, and that should help me market this book. Jackson Browne has one biography, somewhat dated, and there is very little scholarly work on John Denver. Marom's interview style biography and David Yaffe's breathtaking "Literary Biography" *Reckless Daughter* are both examples of the kind of work on Mitchell to which I hope my project contributes. I have drafted out a book proposal for Routledge, which seems to me one of the best places to attempt to publish a book that is hybrid between academic and literary publishing. In fall of 2020, I will consult with several colleagues on moving that proposal forward.

In terms of writing, the chapter on Joni Mitchell and Byron is substantially done and may actually be two chapters depending on how and where this gets published. I've been advised by colleagues not to write *too* much before getting a book deal, but I have a nice chapter on Shelley and Denver drafted, "Embodying Nature: John Denver's Odes to the West Wind." I was working on that chapter when pandemic concerns arose and my writing has certainly stalled since then, although I've worked out the ideas for the chapter on "Precocious Sadness."

I am thankful for the time to work on this project, and for the travel support from the Dean of A & H in fall of 2019 to travel to an international conference on Romanticism where Scholars heard me present on one chapter of this project (on Byron and Mitchell). I look forward to putting the topic of Romanticism and Singer Songwriters on the map of literary and scholarly concerns, and hope to bring Sonoma State some attention in return its their support of this project.