While a few modern scientists have written prose fiction, very few have delved into poetry and none have been counted among any nation's poet laureates. That some of the most important scientists in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were accomplished poets comes as something of a surprise. Did the poetical endeavors of those Romantic era scientists have as much impact on society in general as their scientific discoveries?

Richard Holmes assigned himself the daunting task of simultaneously analyzing both the scientific and literary developments of the Romantic Era. The author's defined emphasis is on William Herschel, the astronomer, and Sir Humphrey Davy, the chemist, but *The Age of Wonder* wanders far and wide both among scientists and authors. Unfortunately that wandering is often not tightly related to the overall theme. For that matter, the overall theme is never clearly defined. Is it the influence that scientific developments of that era had on literature and society? Or, is it the influence that literature and philosophy had on the development of science? This is a lengthy (629 pages) book with Holmes spending nearly 200 pages (but very little about the transit of Venus which was the object of the journey) on spicy tales of the South Pacific (Banks), ballooning, Mungo Park and Frankenstein. With the exception of the last, where the theme of vitalism reflects some influence of literature on science, there is no clear bearing of the other topics on any serious scientific developments. Those 200 pages might have been better spent developing a clearer concept of how science and literature may have interacted.

*The Age of Wonder* is a meticulously researched, scholarly work with an extensive, structured bibliography, references and even a "Cast of Characters". The book's insights into the personalities of several of the greatest thinkers of this remarkable era are worth reading, even if those portraits are at times not very flattering.

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