Michael Meyer (Ed.)

Romantic Explorations

Selected Papers from the Koblenz Conference
of the German Society for English Romanticism

Christoph Bode, Frank Erik Pointner, Christoph Reinfandt (Hg.)

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Michael Meyer (Koblenz)

Exploring Romanticism – Romantic Explorations

The contributions in the present volume take a fresh look at the various ways in which the Romantics redefined traditional notions of literature, the arts, the humanities, and science, exploring new ground in a literal and a metaphorical sense. In general the essays contained here employ interdisciplinary perspectives, combining literary studies, media studies, architecture, art history, gender studies, history, psychology, and philosophy. These articles add new perspectives on well-known authors and topics, reconsider neglected fields, and examine the interaction between the Enlightenment and Romanticism – often crossing national and cultural boundaries.

The first two contributions on the cultural significance of media and on the early development of Romantic ideas in the eighteenth century can be read as a background to the volume as a whole. The opening essay by **Stephen C. Behrendt** studies the economic and social use of media by Romantic writers, artists, publishers, and readers. The media as physical artefacts were designed to stimulate both consumption and communication. Books were not only meant to be seen and read, but also to be discussed and responded to in performative ways in both the private and public spheres. Shops that sold books or prints were sites to look at art and to be seen at. Behrendt singles out the annuals as a specific development of the Romantic age, providing short texts, lavish illustrations, and scores, which called for mutual admiration and musical performance. Teaching the functions of the media as social and economic capital would help to dispel the stereotype of idealistic Romantics, who turn their back on the capitalist market. – **Mihaela Irimia** discusses the prototypical role of George Keate, who published the first poetic account of the Alps in English, in the cultural history of the long eighteenth century. Natural theology, neo-classical composure, the picturesque, and the Romantic sublime vie for supremacy in Keate's works, whose taste for irregularity and the serpentine ultimately carried the day.

The following two essays are dedicated to Wordsworth and space. **Raimund Borgmeier** reconsiders Wordsworth's appreciation of the Lake District. The poet invited readers to take an aesthetic view of their native landscape rather than the Alps. Wordsworth presents literary vistas to residents and tourists rather than practical advice. In spite of attracting an enormous interest in the Lakes, he promoted an early conservationist agenda that warned people not to destroy ecologically sensitive environments and the rustic idyll by introducing non-native plants and mass tourism. – **Martina Domines Veliki** rejects the prevalent notion of Wordsworth's egotistical sublime, dominating nature, in favour of assimilation, employing Bachelard's, Malpas's, and Casey's phenomenological theories of space and memory. She redefines Wordsworth's poetics of space as a reciprocal relationship between the embodied self and nature that shapes and is shaped by human beings. Wordsworth's body served as a medium between the mind and space, and bodily memory as a second dwelling place.

Felicitas Menhard complements Veliki's phenomenological account of the self in space: reciprocity may not lead to integration but alienation. Menhard explores the negotiation of motion in Romantic poetry and painting in its modern era of the ever-in-

creasing pace of life. Walking provided a counterpoint to the acceleration of travelling in the period, and offered the opportunity and time to explore in-depth the qualities and boundaries of the self and the experienced space, to trace a location and to leave traces in turn. However, motion did not necessarily lead to predictable or desired results but could result in the dissociation of the mind and body, self and space, rather than their reconciliation. Menhard proves her point in analyzing poems and pictures and following Boehm's idea that time becomes visible in painting. Pictures reveal the whole gamut of motion and relation, from Constable's immersion of the self in the terrain to Friedrich's immobility of the self and Turner's dissolution of the self. **Cecilia Powell** appreciates Turner's artistic achievement on his travels along the Rhine and its tributaries as a series of experiments with paper and color that go beyond topography and the picturesque even when designed to illustrate travel books. Turner's method, she argues, can be compared to Coleridge's conception of the imagination, as he increasingly takes different bird's-eye views of landscapes that mystify the spectator by swathes of misty indistinctness.

Frederick Burwick develops a meta-perspective on interpretation in the visual arts. He analyzes the double translation of British visual arts into German verbal comment across the channel in the era of the Napoleonic wars. The German writer Hüttner took Lichtenberg's interpretation of Hogarth, based on the gaze and gesture of the figures, the organization of space and motifs, as guidelines for explaining Gillray's caricatures to a German audience, which came under French occupation. Burwick explicates how Hüttner's insight is marred by a series of aporia due to censorship, circumlocution, accidental misinterpretation, conflicting information, and his handing the interpretation over to the reader.

Five contributions deal with the Romantic exploration of the other in more remote geographical, cultural, and historical spaces than the rather close Anglo-German connections elucidated by Powell and Burwick. The other serves as a foil to British identity or an alternative self beyond the confines of British culture. **Mirosława Modrzewska** elaborates on the relationship between Romanticism and the Baroque in the case of Byron's adaptation of a partly mythologized Ukrainian past mediated by the Polish writer Antoni Malczewski, who in turn adopted Byron's style. Byron's *Mazeppa* and Malczewski's *Maria* share the figure of the Cossack on his horse galloping over the vastness of the Ukrainian steppe, embodying chivalry, dignity, liberty, solitude, pessimism, and despair. The Romantic authors constructed an "oxymoronic" image of a Baroque Ukraine that represents both noble values – that were lost through modernization, I would add – and their own nihilist pessimism, which can no longer hope for supernatural solace.

Peter J. Kitson delves into archives for Romantic responses to China in comparison to satiric writings in the pre-Romantic era. He finds less interest in China as opposed to the one in India – in spite of the British involvement in the Far East and reports from China. Caricatures of Chinese art complement Orientalist stereotyping in essays on China and translations from the Chinese, such as Percy's *Hao Ch'iu Chuaan or The Story of an Ideal Marriage*. Southey and Hunt mostly reduced China to an exotic setting for British fantasy and their own affirmation of Western progress and power. However, Gillray's caricature of Lord Macartney's expedition to the Chinese

Emperor Kien Long dismantles any pretension to superiority, as Burwick demonstrates. Kitson accounts for the more negative Orientalist versions of China by reasons of the language barrier and the absence of an outstanding mediator as Sir William Jones for India.

Beyond the well-known Enlightened interest in the social life of the Pacific islands, **Richard Lansdown** finds evidence for an early conception of the Romantic Pacific in the motif of the desert island, which paradoxically became both subjectively relevant and "indifferent to humanity". Travelers, such as Shelvocke or Anson, and Romantic writers revealed the desire for pristine nature, which complemented the guilty awareness of its human destruction. The ideal desert island proved to be an untouched wilderness that displayed the artful and inviting features of a park as an objective correlative to the melancholy or passionate mind, as in Rousseau's *La nouvelle Héloise*. However, the Bounty Mutiny gave rise to alternative responses by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Southey. In their versions, the desert island either imposed inordinate suffering upon the victim of the mutiny, or the guilty rebels embraced its wilderness as a welcome exile.

Two contributions deal with exploring Greek, Roman, and Egyptian antiquity. **Noah Heringman** expounds the new perspectives in the archaeology and art history of the restless and reckless D'Hancarville, who wavered between neo-classical and Romantic notions of history and art. His explication of ancient vases complemented armchair antiquarianism with an innovative, empirical "anthropology of everyday life" of present Naples as a key to the past instead of taking the past as a key to the present. Apart from Greek colonialism and patrons, he believed that folk memory maintained the tradition of classical form and "timeless" art. D'Hancarville viewed writing and painting as "navigational technologies" to the country of the past. However, obscure Egyptian hieroglyphs firstly required the navigational skills of a savvy pilot before they yielded any secrets of the past. **Stefanie Fricke** observes a strong sense of decline in the representation of Egyptian hieroglyphs and contemporary Egypt, which was transferred to British culture and identity. The British defeat of Napoleon in Egypt gave rise to national enthusiasm and resulted in the British appropriation of French trophies of Egypt, among them the famous but then undecipherable Rosetta stone. The erection of triumphant monuments in England in the wake of Nelson's naval victory suggests that Shelley's "Ozymandias" implied an allusion to the future decline of England, an argument spelled out in Horace Smith's sonnet on a future witness's wondering about the meaning of the ruins of what had once been London.

Four essays scrutinize the modern or postmodern implications of Romantic perspectives of the self and world. **Rolf Lessenich** situates the Romantic exploration of the unconscious in the philosophical tradition from antiquity to the Dissenters' introspection and the appropriation of organic, materialist and scientific theories of body and soul in the Enlightenment. The positive psychological interest in the irrational and the fascination with the divided self defied neo-classical notions of order, harmony, and unity. The charting of the dark parts of the psyche submerged under reason found foremost expression in literature and the arts across Europe, which served as precursors of the academic subjects of psychiatry and psychoanalysis, a fertile lineage that is neglected in the history of science. – According to **James Vigus**, Hazlitt did not buy

the argument that the conscious awareness of personal identity would prove its factual existence. Vigus shows that Hazlitt defined the self in a Humean way as a delusional but relevant imaginative and narrative creation. Hazlitt held the creation of the self to be as imaginative as sympathy for others, the selfish interest in a future good for myself or the disinterested one in a good for others. Self-interest would not be more natural than selflessness because it is based on an imagined assumption of an identity of my present with my future self.

Martin Procházka refutes arguments that identify Blake's construct of the imagination with Platonic or Christian ideas. Instead, he reads Blake through Nietzsche, Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari. In his view, Blake's concept of art appears to be an emancipatory force of heterogeneous diversity that disrupts the order of 'legitimate', rational representation and defies the power of the state apparatus without, however, being able to ultimately free itself from the repression of economic and social hierarchies and institutions. To some extent, Percy Bysshe Shelley shared Blake's opposition to Newton's mechanical universe. **Stephanie Dumke** explains how Shelley responded to Goethe's notion of dynamics within the organic whole in the *Theory of Colors*. Here, interdependent and complementary elements form a polarity of continuously unifying and separating forces. Shelley himself had conceived of an entanglement of opposites struggling with each other but remained skeptical of an overarching unity and the supernatural. For Shelley, color resulted from the tension between (white) light and darkness, and was related to life and "*Schein*", meaning paradoxically both celestial light and worldly illusion, outer surface and signifier of the inner workings of beings. Both Goethe and Shelley regarded the color purple as an intensification of red and a unifying force that is visible in sunrises and sunsets but only of transient nature, like the creative process of unifying the multiplicity of the world in verse.

In the field of gender, **Natsuko Hirakura** reveals how Mary Wollstonecraft tried to bridge the gap between emancipation and marriage. Wollstonecraft's epistolary travelogue about her journey to Scandinavia reveals her struggle to combine the positions and the tasks of a professional writer, a mother, and a wife, who served as her husband's agent and tried to save her marriage and her family. Upon her return to Great Britain and the 'separation' from her husband, whom she had apparently married in France, Wollstonecraft had to face her legal status as a single woman with an illegitimate child, who maintained her stance as a moral writer by marking the relevance of her family in her published letters, which helped to make a living for herself and her child of questionable status. In a similar way, if less obvious, the widowed Mary Shelley claimed her share of social esteem and economic capital via writing. Mary Shelley's *Perkin Warbeck*, **Rebecca Domke** maintains, establishes a feminized alternative to Walter Scott's version of the historical novel. Scott would ultimately endorse a history of progress and keep a fairly detached view in his balance of gain and loss. Mary Shelley displays a decidedly partisan view of history and sympathy for a loser of history, Perkin Warbeck, who had been defamed as an impostor of Richard III. Warbeck's admirable personal characteristics, Shelley argues, prevented him from becoming the king even if he would have made a better ruler than Henry VII. It seems that the protagonist's character and career has similarities with Percy Bysshe Shelley's,

whose idealism and early death prevented a more prominent role in society and history. In addition, Mary Shelley seems to vindicate her own character as a widow in the figure of the late Warbeck's wife Katherine, who married again in order to protect and foster her son.

In many ways, **Christine Lai** delivers the keystone of this volume. She deals with architecture as material culture and social media in ways similar to those Behrendt outlined for the use of books and visual artefacts. In addition, Lai covers the broad discourse on architecture in the eighteenth century, as does Irimia on the history of ideas, and adds to Dumke's view of opposites in Percy Bysshe Shelley's thought. Shelley, Lai elucidates, recognizes that the Coliseum is based on a history of aggression but suggests that its circular shape alludes to (future) harmony. Lai's analysis of reflecting upon the past in the present and the present as the ruins of the past in the future also suggests a link to the analyses of antiquity by Heringman and to Fricke's interpretation of the contradictory sense of power conveyed by the remnants of Egyptian grandeur. Lai draws a complex and ironic picture of London architecture as a process of destruction and rebuilding that aims at unification and segregation. She points out that the Regency Park Project modelled London on Rome to express and infuse national power and pride. Rome as a model suggested an outdated form of domination to critics, and the decline of Rome a sceptical analogy of London's future. The Regency Park Project literally and metaphorically divided London on the basis of class at the same time as the grandeur of its architecture and new national monuments should instil a feeling of national unity that effaced the social division it cemented. However, the grand scheme of rebuilding London was based on the demolition of existing structures (Bataille), which intensified the fascination with ruins of the past – and the future ruin of one's own edifices and hopes of progress. – Last, but not least, Lai sounds a topic that heralds the upcoming conference and volume on Romantic Cityscapes.

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