Sandra Heinen, Katharina Rennhak (Eds.)

Narratives of Romanticism

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

Christoph Bode, Jens Martin Gurr, Frank Erik Pointner (Hg.)

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Narratives of Romanticism: Introduction

The biennial conference of the German Society of English Romanticism has become not only an anchor point in the academic calendar of German scholars of Romanticism, but also an institution in international Romantic scholarship. When we first considered bringing the GER-conference to the University of Wuppertal, and contemplated potential conference topics, we quickly came to a decision. One of the main research areas at the University is the study of narrative, institutionalised in the interdisciplinary Center for Narrative Research (CNR), which was founded in 2007. Thus, the combination of Romantic and narrative research was an obvious choice, but more importantly, it brought into focus the intersection of two extremely productive fields.

The two key terms of the conference theme, 'narrative' and 'Romanticism,' have both undergone major re-definitions during the last few decades. It seems quite a long time since the lyric dominated the 'Period Formerly (and still) Known as Romanticism' as its main mode and since Romantic fiction was routinely discarded as having "little intrinsic merit" and rarely rising above the "level of mediocrity" (Watt 290). Yet, although Romantic fiction is no longer "one of the most underresearched – or unevenly researched – areas of English literature" (155), as it was still described by Amanda Gilroy and Wil Verhoeven in 2001, and while the Romantic period has now become recognised as "an extraordinarily eventful and decisive phase in the development of the British novel" (O'Brien xvii), the work of recovering and re-assessing novels as well as other narrative genres of the period is still very much in progress. A similar stimulating re-orientation and expansion of the research field has taken place in the study of narrative: new genres and media have come into focus, and various new or 'postclassical' approaches have emerged in answer to a broader concept of narrative and the increased interest in cultural and historical contextualisation (see Sommer).

The phrase *Narratives of Romanticism* eventually chosen as the conference's and volume's title is deliberately ambiguous, so as to allow for two different ways of bringing 'narrative' and 'Romanticism' together. 'Narratives of Romanticism' can, on the one hand, refer to narratives *written during* the Romantic period. On the other hand, it can also denote narratives *about* the Romantic period. Discussions of both types of 'narratives of Romanticism' were explicitly invited and can now be found in this volume. Although the distinction between the two readings of the phrase is not in all cases clear-cut, it is in a general way reflected in the order assigned to the contributions: The volume starts with contributions exploring various narratives *from* the Romantic period and then turns to chapters probing existing or proposing alternative narratives *about* the Romantic period.

Reflecting the revised role of fiction in the study of Romanticism, a significant portion of the contributions discussing narratives *from* the Romantic period are concerned with novels. The novels analysed include both well known works, such as Ma-

dame de Staël's *Corinne*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*, Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* or Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* and *Desmond*, as well as some less familiar examples, such as Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*, Walter Scott's *Redgauntlet*, B. S. Ingemann's *The Childhood of King Erik Menved*, and Sophia Lee's *The Recess*. In addition to novels, the narrativity of high Romantic poetic works by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats is treated in four contributions. David Duff and Jan Alber suggest re-readings of canonical poems, Mathelinda Nabugodi and Michael O'Neill also examine narrative aspects of lyrical drama. In the last five chapters of this volume by Claire Connolly, Seth T. Reno, Sabrina Sontheimer, Christopher Catanese and Saree Makdisi the analysis of Romantic texts serves the authors in their various attempts to modify influential scholarly narratives *about* the Romantic period.

In order to demonstrate the fruitful results of the Wuppertal GER-conference 2015 and to make visible at least some of the manifold ways in which the different contributions speak to and enrich each other, we would like to highlight some of the thematic issues, reflecting recent trends in literary and cultural studies of Romanticism and in narrative studies, which are most frequently addressed in the articles assembled here. Broadly speaking, most of the essays can be said to engage in ongoing discussions about the relationship between 'genre and ideology' and that between 'narration and ethics,' and – often in this context – several articles analyse narrative constructions of (communal and personal) identities. Drawing on a variety of theoretical approaches from postcolonial studies, to ecocriticism, Deleuzian deconstruction and affect theory, some contributors reflect on the ethics of the narrative aesthetics while others reconstruct aspects of larger Romantic discourses (such as nationalism, historiography or the discourse on happiness) by laying bare prominent narrative features on the *histoire*- and/or *discours*-level of selected texts. All these contributions ask what narratives do for us or did for the Romantics. The contributors to this volume see narratives as important human means of organising experience, whose major function is sense-making: Narratives create coherence by suggesting causality and plausibility; events that occur can be represented as being motivated, for example, by characters' internal states, as the outcome of their actions or as the result of contingent processes or certain social circumstances. Most contributors to this volume also share the assumption – famously propagated by various Romantic authors – that, in addition, fictional narratives in verse or prose have a more specific potential, as they provide a space for thought experiments, for developing and thinking through alternatives to the actual world we live in.

Quite a number of articles debate the issue of 'narrativity and genre,' which is most programmatically addressed by Christopher Catanese, who suggests a new systematic approach to the Romantic genre-system (see below) and by **David Duff**, who addresses the question of how narratological tools and concerns can be fruitfully employed to provide innovative readings of Romantic poetry. In a chapter called "Turns,

Transports and Transformations: Lyric Events in Romantic Poetry," he draws in particular on Peter Hühn's conception of 'eventfulness' as measured by the degree to which a narrative "violates convention or frustrates reader-expectation" (137). Since reader-expectations are conditioned by conventions and thus subject to historical change, a literary text's eventfulness can only be determined in historical context. In Romantic poetry and poetics, Duff argues, a significant 'recalibration' of what constitutes a 'lyric event' can be observed. In the analysis of two canonical poems, Wordsworth's "The Idiot Boy" and Coleridge's "The Nightingale," Duff illustrates how a "new kind of lyric eventfulness" (146) is created by breaking with conventional literary scripts and through "the transposition of narrative into lyric, a displacement of the 'event' from the storyline into the rhetorical and emotional 'plot' of lyric discourse" (146). Michael O'Neill also negotiates this aspect of 'Narratives of Romanticism' in his reflections on the intersection of dramatic, lyrical and narrative elements by drawing on the concept of 'play' in his analysis of Byron's *Beppo* and Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas* (more details below).

Several contributors who deal with questions of 'narrativity and genre' take a fresh look at specific subgenres of the Romantic novel: the *Bildungsroman* (Ian Duncan), the historical novel (Lis Møller; also see Raphaël Ingelbien), the national tale (Ralf Haekel), counterfactual fiction (Angela Esterhammer and Tilottama Rajan) as well as the conservative novel (Pascal Fischer). By carefully analysing two examples of bestselling historical novels from different national traditions, **Lis Møller** demonstrates how the narratives bequeathed to Romantics by the medieval ballad tradition have, in turn, found access into the fictional worlds depicted by authors of historical fiction. Her contribution "Ballads into Novels: Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and B. S. Ingemann's *The Childhood of King Erik Menved*" traces the two novelists' sources and reflects on their functions in the context of the larger Romantic project of nation building and the imagining of national and regional communities. Both authors, Scott and Ingemann, Møller argues, are not only inspired by narratives taken from the ballad tradition or integrate the ballads themselves into their story-worlds to create a seemingly 'authentic' medieval universe. In addition, they reflect on the form, relationship, and hierarchy of the two genres – the ballad and the novel – and, in the case of Ingemann, even provide "the reader with something in the line of a novelistic theory of medieval balladry" (111).

Two contributions in this volume explore the interweaving of fact and fiction in counterfactual narratives of the Romantic period. **Tilottama Rajan**'s contribution "Sophia Lee's Baroque Narratology: *The Recess* and the (Dis)simulation of the Real" focusses on an early Romantic text, a "boldly counterfactual romance […] meant to strip the veneer of legitimacy from received history" (123). In order to make sense of the striking repetition of stories and characters in *The Recess*, and in contradistinction to mimetically feminist readings, Rajan proposes a take on Lee's novel "in terms of a modal rather than propositional or predicative logic" (127). Drawing on Deleuzian concepts, she invites us to see the novel as an archive of story elements and their pos-

sible combinations, independently of their fictionality or factuality. A very different perspective on the counterfactual is advanced by **Angela Esterhammer**. Her contribution "Speculative Fiction and Counterfactual Narrative in Scottish and Irish Romanticism" examines four different prose texts – one essay on counterfactual historiography and three fictional narratives containing counterfactual elements – which were published almost simultaneously in 1824 and thus testify to the late Romantic period's intensified interest in speculation. As Esterhammer suggests in a media-historical contextualisation, the recurring practice of combining the factual with the counterfactual in fictional narratives might be a response to "the new media of the age, especially the market dominance of newspapers and magazines and the writing and reading practices associated with them" (121): Accordingly, counterfactual narratives can be regarded as adopting the "new practices of observation, documentation, and social critique" (121) that also characterise the period's periodical publications.

In "*Bildung* versus *Roman*: Germaine de Staël's *Corinne*" **Ian Duncan** unravels the ideological implications of the novel of development through a reading of de Staël's novel *Corinne, or Italy* as an engagement with German aesthetic theory on the one hand, and English novelistic practice on the other. The conventions of the realist novel, dominant in Britain from the early nineteenth century onwards, are in de Staël's text shown to be incompatible with the ideals of self-realisation (*Bildung*) and universal poetic energy (*Universalpoesie*) championed by German idealism: "the novelistic plot, with its imperative of socialization through marriage, cancels *Bildung* […]. Staël's heroine personifies the ideals of the aesthetic education and universal progressive poetry proposed in German Romantic theory – but it is her misfortune to fall into a novel, which kills her." (18) The relationship between narrative form and ideology is also discussed by **Pascal Fischer** in his contribution "Anti-Illusionist Self-Reflexivity in the Conservative Romantic Novel: Elizabeth Hamilton's *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers*." In literary studies, metafiction "as a means to critique and expose dominant ideologies" (69) is frequently associated with progressive politics, while politically conservative writers are considered to be particularly prone to employ traditional, authoritative story-telling techniques. Fischer, however, reminds us that such generalising form-to-function mappings have to be treated with caution. His analysis of Hamilton's anti-Jacobin novel *Memoirs of Modern Philosophers* demonstrates that experimental story-telling can also serve conservative political ends, since the novel's metafictional elements, repeatedly reminding readers of the narrative's fictionality, "are intended to subdue the passions aroused by the fictional plot and to prevent readers from becoming charmed by the illusionary fictional worlds which may open the minds to the political chimeras of radicalism" (74). In the hands of Hamilton, metafiction is thus administered as an 'antidote' to the corruptive potential of fictional narratives.

Like Ian Duncan and Pascal Fischer, Michael O'Neill and Camille Barrera are interested in ideological aspects of Romantic narratives in that both discuss attempts by Romantic authors to come to terms with the potentially subjugating power and the (unavoidably?) hegemonic implications of all forms of narration. In "Narrative and

Play: Byron's *Beppo* and Shelley's *The Witch of Atlas*," **Michael O'Neill** demonstrates how the two dramatic Romantic "poems exploit the freedom offered by the *ottava rima* form and comic Italian tradition to post an exhilarating, defiant trust in the poetic imagination" (177). Drawing on concepts of 'play' by Brian Nellist and Hans-Georg Gadamer, O'Neill argues that although Byron and Shelley play the same aesthetic game of telling a subversive and visionary story, they do so differently. While the former "revels in stories as endlessly multiplying tales" (190), whose proliferation unhinges traditional hierarchies, the latter is more interested in the very mechanisms of storytelling and in "their origin in a fundamental principle to create, to respond, to adapt, to work on the world" (190). Tracing "The Ethics of the Storyteller's Dis/Appearance in *Moby-Dick* and *The Last Man*," **Camille Barrera** discovers intriguing similarities between Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* on the level of narrative transmission: Both novels negotiate the liberating and confining effects of the "storytelling impulse in human beings" (Swingle) by reflecting on the ethical and moral implications of the two dominant modes of "presenting events in a narrative": that is, 'showing' and 'telling' (Klauk and Köppe). Barrera argues the novels' readers learn that "narrative (or representation) can provide access to truth, but only when freed of the expectation that it can 'contain' that truth" (46), because they witness how Shelley's and Melville's first-person narrators themselves become entangled in the very mechanisms of the captivating and ideologically dubious aspects of storytelling which the novels more overtly criticise when these mechanisms are employed by the narrator-protagonists' antagonists, Raymond and Ahab.

Mathelinda Nabugodi and Jeffrey Champlin also reflect on the intersection of narration, power and ethics, but focus on Romantic negotiations of the (im-)possibility of envisioning a brighter future in their chapters. In "Dream Revisions: Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Queen Mab* and *Hellas*," **Mathelinda Nabugodi** offers subtle readings of Shelley's political poems written at the beginning and end of his career, respectively. She argues that the poet-prophet not only revises his lyric and philosophic vision of history, first established in *Queen Mab*, throughout his lifetime but, by carefully analysing the function of Shelley's Ahasuerus figure and other structural parallels and differences of the philosophical poem and the verse drama, Nabugodi also demonstrates that "Shelley's own historiographical vision is characterised precisely by being revisionary in the way that *Hellas* revises and re-visions *Queen Mab*" (164). The life-long process of narrating and re-narrating the complex interactions of past, present and future in order to envision, re-vision and even 'unvision' a better world is thus shown to be an inherent feature of Shelley's attempts to come to terms with the world's history of suffering and misery just as much as it is of his philosophy of history. Nabugodi's argument culminates in the provocative assumption that Shelley eventually comes to the conclusion that a brighter future can only be conceived once we can "escape the miseries of history" (175). In his contribution "The Future of the Broken Promise: Body Structuralism and Earth Narrative in *Frankenstein*," **Jeffrey Champlin** approaches the question of the ethics of storytelling, in general, and the visionary power

of human beings, in particular, by re-reading one of the most frequently discussed novels of British Romanticism. Availing himself of concepts by Agamben, Dolar, and Žižek, which he subsumes under the term 'body structuralism,' he carefully analyses the exchange of promises between Frankenstein and the monster during their encounter in the Alps. Reflecting on Frankenstein's and the creature's promises as (impossible) speech acts, he argues that "the creature's body holds up narratives of social integration" (27) and that the monster, thus, embodies projections of a better future. However, those who are, like Frankenstein, immediately confronted with the monstrous must interpret the creature's promise as a threat and are therefore unable to follow up on the (embodied) promise of a better future. Still, Mary Shelley's narrative challenges its readers to "look ahead – now – for stories of the future" (36).

In her article "Emplotting Happiness: Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* and *Desmond*" **Katrin Röder** argues that late eighteenth-century novelists such as Smith contributed to the construction of political narratives of happiness, which – as some critics have claimed – were neglected by the seminal legal and political texts of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century reformers and revolutionaries in Europe. Adopting the theoretical concept of happiness developed by Vivasvan Soni as well as the narrative hermeneutics of Paul Ricœur and Peter Brooks, she analyses the plot structure of Smith's novels *Celestina* and *Desmond* and thus not only shows that "happiness is an open hermeneutic horizon which spans individual and communal forms of existence as well as social and political conditions characterized by freedom from oppression, by social justice and equality" (65); but also points to the power of fictional narratives to establish visions of a happier future.

A number of authors investigate narratives as means of identity construction. Sabrina Sontheimer and Jan Alber use the binary concept of 'self and other' most patently. **Jan Alber** focuses in "Narrating the Orient: Some Brief Eastern Episodes in Romantic Poetry" on representations of "Oriental storyworlds, agents, or objects" (150) in a number of canonical 'narrative poems' from Keats's *The Eve of St. Agnes* to Wordsworth's *The Prelude* and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan." Basing his analysis and interpretation on David Herman's definition of 'narratives,' he reasserts Edward Said's claim that nineteenth-century English literature is "invested in 'legitimizing and authorizing the superiority of an Occidental sense of self as opposed to an Oriental other'" (150). In "James Cook and the Other(s): Multiple Authorship and Narrating Alterity", **Sabrina Sontheimer** questions the perception of travel writing as expressing a subject's personal perspective on the world by pointing out that historical travel accounts are rarely the product of a single author. Sontheimer discusses the implications of the practice of multiple authorship for the analysis of travel narratives as constructions of alterity with regard to different versions of James Cook's account of his fist voyage to the Pacific Ocean: the original diary, the published version based on the original diary but rewritten by John Hawkesworth, and John C. Beaglehole's twentieth-century scholarly edition, which adds "numerous voices to Cook's narrative" (230). The analysis maintains that "the representations of 'the other' and 'the self' undergo a qualitative reorientation"

(235) in the course of being rewritten by successive authors. At the same time, Sontheimer's chapter also contributes to the rewriting of the influential Romantic narrative of the self-sufficient, self-present and holistic author-subject begun by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault a couple of decades ago.

Several articles collected in this volume – Claire Connolly's, Angela Esterhammer's, Ralf Haekel's, Raphaël Ingelbien's and Lis Møller's – address questions of narration and English, Irish and/or Scottish Romantic literature and thereby contribute to the expanding research field of Regional Romanticism. **Ralf Haekel** takes up the ongoing discussion on "The Narrative Construction of Irish National Identity" in what is, arguably, the first Irish national tale, Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl.* He approaches the issue by investigating a number of tensions established by the binary of "origin and continuity" (79), which has been shown to be fundamental to Romantic and Romanticism's discourses of the nation. Situating his analysis in the context of reflections on cultural nationalism by Benedict Anderson and Joep Leerssen and on recent studies of the Irish national tale, he underlines the world-making and community-building power of narratives in general and investigates the specific "narrative arrangement" which enables Owenson to achieve "a coherence and continuity that stabilize[s] the process of identity formation" in *The Wild Irish Girl* (84), while "simultaneously undermining […] claim[s] to authenticity" (87) by ostentatiously representing Ireland through the lens of famous literary *topoi*.

In his article "The 'Headachy School' of Fiction: Thomas Colley Grattan and the Irish Romantic Novel," **Raphaël Ingelbien** establishes the relevance of the all but forgotten Irish author Thomas Colley Grattan and reflects on his marginalisation, the main reasons for which he locates in "an emerging canonical narrative that would make the aesthetic principles of leading English poets central to subsequent definitions of Romantic culture" (91). (Ingelbien's chapter thus also contributes to the project of re-narrating literary history.) Grattan's commercially successful historical novels have slipped under the radar of literary and cultural research, he argues, because literary scholars had, and often still have, difficulties in doing justice to cosmopolitan authors such as Grattan (who repeatedly travelled through Europe, lived in France for several years and was a long-term resident of Bruges and Brussels) in their predominantly *national* literary histories. While Ingelbien acknowledges the derivative nature of Grattan's novels, who "actually casts himself as a modest [and belated] disciple of Walter Scott" (94), he also argues for his rediscovery in the context of what one contemporary reviewer called the 'headachy school' of fiction. If Grattan's work is grouped with authors such as Charles Robert Maturin and Lady Morgan, who produced equally unwieldy narratives, Ingelbien argues, what becomes apparent are persistent "mutual imbrications between British and Irish Romantic fiction" (99) rather than the ideologically suspect 'Irish Other' which contemporary commentators often found in these authors' hybrid and chaotically multifaceted novels.

Concepts of 'nature' and 'the land' have been of major significance for Irish Studies in general and the study of Irish Romanticism in particular. In her article "Natural His-

tory and the History of Nature: Environmental Narratives in Irish Romanticism," **Claire Connolly**, however, is less interested than most critics to date in literary representations of the cultural and political significance of the Irish landscape, asking instead "what happens […] when the specificities of geographical space meet the arc of narrative form" (195). Her argument, positioned at the intersection of Regional Romantic Studies and ecocriticism, takes into consideration texts like Horatio Townsend's *Statistical Survey of Cork* (1808) or the *Ordnance Survey of Ireland* and establishes a new context for literary texts by such canonical Irish authors as Maria Edgeworth or Lady Morgan. Her chapter culminates in a careful analysis of James Clarence Mangan's "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey at Teach Molaga," which is shown to negotiate the precarious interdependence of social communities and "an imperilled natural world" (11). Connolly thus provides renegotiations of 'the nature' of Irish Romanticism in two ways which mirror the two senses of 'narratives of Romanticism' distinguished at the beginning of this introduction: Focusing on environmental phenomena *in* Romantic texts, she reflects on issues of narration, ethics and Irish identity. Simultaneously, she contributes to initiating an alternative literary and cultural narrative of Irish Romanticism. Like Sontheimer's and Ingelbien's contributions and the articles addressed in what follows, Connolly's chapter can therefore be regarded as belonging to the group of articles which deal with issues of 'narration, ethics and identity', while at the same offering 'narratives of Romanticism' in the second sense, in so far as they contribute to the reconstruction of dominant academic narratives about the period.

Like Claire Connolly, **Seth T. Reno** also contributes to an ecocritical narrative of Romanticism. Combining ecocriticism with affect theory in "Romantic Clouds: Narrating Climate Change," he engages in a close reading of cloud motifs in a broad range of major Romantic works of art to complement existing accounts of the Romantics' relationship to nature. Drawing on Timothy Morton's concept of the 'hyperobject,' Reno argues that literary and painterly representations of clouds serve to trigger reflections on the 'hyperobject' climate change, a phenomenon that is "measurable but not tangible, felt but not completely understood" (214) and, thus, best approached through the aesthetics of Romanticism which tend to revolve around and prompt affective responses to natural phenomena. 'Romantic clouds,' Reno argues, can therefore be understood as an "early articulation of ecological awareness" (212) giving expression to a Romantic-era narrative of climate change that oscillates between fear and hope.

Christopher Catanese and Saree Makdisi address questions of periodisation in the last two articles of our volume, and in the process make significant contributions to the project of narrating alternative literary histories. In his chapter titled "Survival Narratives: Georgic Extinction and the Romantic Genre-System" **Christopher Catanese** discusses methodological questions concerning the narrative construction of the past and proposes to use narrative models developed in the theory of natural history to describe change in literary history. More specifically, he turns to Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's biological developmentalism, a theory which aligns an organism's ability to survive

with its adaption to its milieu, in order to describe the historical development of genres. The genre of the georgic chosen by Catanese as a test case is an interesting example not only because it fell quite suddenly from favour in the second half of the eighteenth century, but also because it produced a historical 'anomaly' with Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* (1800), a georgic poem which became a bestseller decades after the genre's decline. Catanese's analysis succinctly demonstrates the utility of the Lamarckian model, which can account for both phenomena, in the first instance as a reaction to "Romanticism's radical transformation of the literary milieu" (246), and in the second instance by casting Bloomfield's generic innovations as successful adaptations to the Romantic milieu.

Whereas Catanese repositions Romanticism by looking back and tracing a literary-historical phenomenon of the eighteenth century, **Saree Makdisi** proposes to "reconsider the very category of Romanticism and its relationship to modernity" (260) in the last chapter of this volume, "Blake, Lamb, London." In contrast to conventional narratives of Romanticism which assume modernity to have a monolithic form and which cast writers such as William Blake and Charles Lamb as essentially anti-modern, Makdisi argues that there are – and have always been – "different modes of modernity" and that Blake and Lamb, as well as Mary Robinson, should be considered as representatives of a Romantic *alter*-modernity. His careful readings of poems (by Blake and Robinson) as well as essays by Lamb about life in the capital serve to carve out articulations of an urban alter-modernity which can be regarded as characteristic of, though not unique to, Romanticism: a "mode of experiencing cityness in which, in the moment of visual, aural or sensual encounters of bodies in need, time itself slips and slides and sticks" (264).

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