

# Foreword : Romanticism across Borders

Thomas Constantinesco, Sophie Laniel-Musitelli

▶ **To cite this version:**

Thomas Constantinesco, Sophie Laniel-Musitelli. Foreword : Romanticism across Borders. Romanticism and the Philosophical Tradition, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 2015, 978-2-8143-0231-0. hal-01349784

**HAL Id: hal-01349784**
**https://hal.univ-lille.fr/hal-01349784**

Submitted on 11 Sep 2017

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# ROMANTICISM and the PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

edited by Thomas CONSTANTINESCO and Sophie LANIEL-MUSITELLI



PUN – ÉDITIONS UNIVERSITAIRES DE LORRAINE

# Romanticism and the Philosophical Tradition

ISBN : 978-2-8143-0231-0
© 2015
Presses Universitaires de Nancy – Éditions Universitaires de Lorraine
42-44, avenue de la Libération BP 3347 – 54014 Nancy Cedex.

En application de la loi du 11 mars 1957, il est interdit de reproduire intégralement ou partiellement le présent ouvrage sans autorisation de l'éditeur ou du Centre français du copyright, 6 bis, rue Gabriel-Laumain, 75010 Paris.

# Romanticism and the Philosophical Tradition

*Edited by*
Thomas CONSTANTINESCO and Sophie LANIEL-MUSITELLI

Presses Universitaires de Nancy – Éditions Universitaires de Lorraine

# Acknowledgements

Our warm thanks go to the French Society for the Study of Romanticism (SERA), who set this project in motion and to the scientific committee of the Romanticism and Philosophy conference (Prof. M. Duplay, Prof. T. Dutoit, Prof. J.-M. Fournier and Prof. M. Porée) for their guidance and support. We are grateful to our institutions, the University of Lille and the University of Paris 7, and in particular to our research centers Cecille and LARCA, who supported this project from the start. We are particularly thankful to M. Jean-François Delcroix (University of Lille) for his invaluable help throughout the project and to Prof. John Bak, who expertly steered the book to completion as editorial director of « Regards Croisés sur le monde anglophone ». We would also like to thank the University of Lorraine for its generous contribution. Our thanks go to Dr. Stefanie Fricke and to Prof. Christoph Bode for permission to reprint a chapter from *Romanticism and Knowledge* (Trier: WVT, forthcoming). We are also grateful to the Toledo Museum of Art, the Tate Gallery, the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen museum in Dresden, the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere in Vienna, the Kunsthalle museum in Hambourg, the Berlin Nationalgalerie and Reunion des Musées Nationaux for permission to reproduce paintings from their collections. Finally, we would like to thank our contributors for their hard work and kind cooperation.

# Foreword:
# Romanticism across Borders

Thomas CONSTANTINESCO and Sophie LANIEL-MUSITELLI

## Pre-histories and Afterlives

This book originates in an international conference on "Romanticism and Philosophy" held in Lille in September 2012 and organized jointly by the French Society for the Study of British Romanticism (SERA) and the Universities of Paris Diderot and Lille. It includes a selection of revised papers, as well as specially commissioned essays, in both English and French, all bound by a common concern for the relations between Romanticism and the philosophical tradition, from Germany to Britain, and from Antiquity up to contemporary theory.

Grounded in varied but complementary theoretical backgrounds and reading practices, and drawing on a wide array of writers and thinkers (from Herder to Shelley, and from Plato to Derrida and Badiou), the various contributions explore the kinship and the conflicts which bind literature and art to philosophy during two major phases of Romanticism, in Germany and in England, opening passages and highlighting continuities between the philosophical ambitions and innovations of Romantic artists and the legacy of Romanticism in philosophy and in literary and aesthetic theory. Each in its own way, the essays gathered here view Romanticism as a key moment in the history of thought and examine how Romanticism both inherits and departs from the tradition of philosophy, from Antiquity to the Enlightenment, as much as they explore the many legacies of Romanticism in contemporary philosophical debates up to Deconstruction and beyond.

The notion of tradition implies continuity in time, a strong genealogy and a form of teleology, from forefathers to future heirs, as a discipline defines its history through a number of canonical texts and tutelary figures. The transactions of Romanticism with the tradition of philosophy are necessarily complex, owing to the problematic historicity of Romanticism. In *The Literary Absolute*, Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe define Romanticism as a "*moment of writing*" (*moment d'écriture* [15]) that cannot easily be integrated into the narrative of literary history: "Ni simple 'mouvement littéraire,' ni – encore moins – apparition d'on ne sait trop quelle 'nouvelle sensibilité,' pas même reprise … des problèmes classiques de la théorie de l'art ou de l'esthétique" (42). For Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Romanticism is not simply one more literary movement: it throws into doubt usual landmarks in literary history but also the very notion of periodization. Romanticism challenges the notion of influence, as it developed within the philosophical crisis opened by Kantian transcendental idealism, burning the bridges back to earlier movements, making Romantic artists the orphans, rather than the children, of the traditions of the *belles lettres* and of the Enlightenment. Does placing Romanticism outside periodization as an essentially reflexive moment mean relinquishing History, losing Romanticism as a historical process, as a product of its time but also, and above all, as a political force? Historicity has been at the heart of the critical debate on the political stakes of Romanticism for the last decades. In *The Romantic Ideology*, Jerome McGann has acutely pointed to the political consequences of abstracting Romanticism from its time, place and infrastructure of production. According to Eric Lecler in *L'Absolu et la littérature*, by turning early Romanticism into a mode of thinking about History that transcends historical periodization, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe locate Romantic literature outside the contingencies of History, "at the cost of its [political] significance" (14, our translation). Lecler's essay illustrates the ability of Romanticism to bend the course of time as it questions Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of the Romantic concept of literature in order to reappraise the political subtexts of Structuralism and Deconstruction. What is at stake in this debate, in the wake of the works of Sartre and Rancière, is the ability of Romantic writing to generate a political

discourse in its own terms, rather than as a mere illustration or product of the political debates at the time.

What remains of a tradition once stripped of its grounding in temporal continuity? Our contention is that it can be traced in terms of "pre-histories" and "afterlives." We take our cue here from Terence Cave's long-standing engagement with the Early Modern period, as we believe that the critical methods he helped develop also make for a fruitful approach of Romanticism (cf. Cave, *Pré-histoires* and *Pré-histoires II*; Holland and Scholar). "Pre-history" explores a time before history, a stage that predates a radical shift in paradigms. It reaches for what has long been forgotten, and gestures towards what can only be postulated as a beginning and can only be fragmentarily pieced together. More often than not, the history of thought does not follow linear patterns and relies on circuitous transfers, both conceptual and figural, whose many twists and turns our various contributors attempt to trace. In this collection, we would like to approach Romanticism as a movement constantly bending the course of its history, inventing its roots and its future lives, paving the way for Deconstruction as it questions the concept of origin. Recent critics, focusing on "Romantic presences in the 20th century" (Sandy) or on Romantic "persistence" (Eldridge) have redefined the political import of Romanticism outside periodization paying particular attention to its unfailing political commitment as an affirmation of man's freedom through critical consciousness, from the 18th century to our times. Richard Eldridge defines Romantic "persistence" as the continued endeavour to attain voice in the absence of moral or subjective certainties, as "Romanticism takes the form of an effort to find not so much a fully shared social solution to the problem of freedom but rather a voice to bear, at least in part, recognizably, a power to address that problem, if not to solve it" (20). Similarly, Nikolas Kompridis defines the collection of essays on *Philosophical Romanticism* that he edited as a "re-inheritance of romanticism" (2) where tradition is less an heirloom than shared ethics. In the same way, the notion of "afterlife" offers a vision of Romanticism as creatively programmatic, since the questioning of origins and stable foundations is also the promise of a second life, from De Man's *Blindness and Insight* to Derrida's *De la Grammatologie*. Romanticism finds its

afterlife in a return to innovation through reflexiveness and criticism, so that, if Romanticism continues indeed to haunt our theoretical reveries, its spectral presence is less the symptom of our declension than the very sign of how invigorating it still remains for us as an enduring invitation for further thinking.

## From "Risky Entanglement" to "Strategies of Unlimitations"

Written by philosophers, literary scholars and art historians, the different chapters not only confront British Romanticism with its German counterpart, in an effort to reconfigure our understanding of these two national "moments" in the history of Romanticism, but they also work at the crossroads of several disciplines, true to the inaugural spirit of Romanticism, at a time when generic and institutional boundaries were challenged and largely redrawn, and when art, literature and philosophy as we still know them today first emerged.

In the **overture** to our study of Romanticism across borders, "Smooth and Tangled Systems: Philosophy as Metadiscipline in German Idealism," Tilottama Rajan looks into the thin dividing line between Romantic literature and philosophy as sites of reflexiveness. Kant's and later Hegel's attempts at positing philosophy as a metadiscipline within the institutional landscape of intellectual disciplines, from literature and art to natural history, force philosophy to question its own objects, field and methods. Rather than a mere *doppelgänger* for philosophy (Lecler 20), Romantic literature constitutes a "mirror-stage" for philosophy, which confronts its other through its own modes of thought. Thinking through literature, philosophy encounters its own forms of knowledge as "dangerously figural," entering a dangerous area of "entanglement." This "hiatus … becomes a space of speculation," as philosophy must think itself from the outside, confront itself to the otherness of literature, "releasing a troubling and creative speculative volatility" as hidden tropes become central paradigms in the architectonics of disciplines and in the definition of philosophy as a metadiscipline. The determination of Romantic writing as the inauguration of the literary absolute, as a form of immanent absolute through reflexiveness and self-sufficiency, is questioned by a vision of the constant disciplinary interplay at the margins

of philosophy "expos[ing] disciplines to their 'unthought' through the recourse they often have to other disciplines from which they borrow in order to understand their objects."

The contributions are organized along thematic and methodological lines. The first chapter, "**Philosophy and Literature in Romanticism**," explores the "dangerously figural" (Rajan, this volume) within philosophy, the hidden tropes of German and Danish philosophy, and more specifically the interplay of rhetorical figures and philosophical concepts in the works of Herder, Kant and Kierkegaard. In "Herder, une écriture expressive des singularités," analyzing the literariness of Herder's philosophical writing, Claire Pagès explores the inauguration of Romantic philosophy as a confrontation of philosophy with literature, through Herder's conception of the "unity of language and thought," implying a solidarity of form and content in philosophical discourse. In Thomas Dutoit's "Principles of Likeness or Equality (*Gleichheit*) in Kantian Penal Law and International History and in Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*," Kleist's vision of law and justice in *Michael Kohlhass* unveils the underlying principle of metaphoric substitution at work within Kant's philosophical discourse, a perfect example of the "entanglement" (Rajan, this volume) of philosophy with literature, as "Kant's writing is rampant with a rhetorical, even poetic, function." In "De la 'poésie universelle progressive' à la 'communication indirecte': la présence de la réflexion romantique dans la pensée kierkegaardienne," exploring the metaphysical reach of the concept of irony, Sebastian Hüsch demonstrates how a literary device becomes a central concept in Kierkegaard's philosophical writing.

Conversely, "**The Poetic Forms of Thought**" looks at the way poetry becomes a locus for philosophical speculation in the works of Henry Brooke, William Wordsworth and Percy B. Shelley. John Baker's "Atonement and the Philosophical Poem: Some Affinities Between Henry Brooke and William Wordsworth" reaches across temporal borders from the 18th-century genre of the philosophical poem to Wordsworth's "philosophic song," looking into the syncretizing ambition of poetry, at the "adventurous, unwieldy and cross-border (un)holy alliance of poetry, philosophy, religion and science that comes together in these

encyclopaedic and kaleidoscopic poems." In "The Merry Tinker and the Beautiful Beggars: Wordsworth's Experiments in Poetic Thinking," Jeremy Elprin explores the conflicting strains of irony and sympathy in Wordsworth's poetry, as Wordsworth's poetics of revision inherits and transforms the dialectics of creation and destruction at work in *Frühromantik* irony. Jennifer Horan's "Potentiality, Gesturality, and the Lyric: A Study of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*" is an exploration of Romanticism as a theoretical project, as the margins of philosophy become poetically creative in the delicate poise between speech and silence, history and potentiality, of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*.

The drive towards the "imageless" (Shelley 250; *Prometheus Unbound* II iv, l. 116) in Shelley's poetry leads us to the last two chapters of our collection, dealing with the Romantic move from a conception of poetry as the ornament of an existing discourse to the "visionary gleam" of Romantic writing (Wordsworth 298; "Ode – Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," l. 56). "**Poetry, Philosophy, and Knowledge**" deals with the shift from the conception of literature as *mimesis* to a conception of writing as "bearer of truth" (Bowie 16). Yann Tholoniat demonstrates that Burns's poetry does not merely reflect Rousseau's concept of social contract, but elaborates a contract of its own between man and nature, in the problematic but creatively generative articulation of political bond and organic unity, in a "brotherhood" of man and nature anticipating Michel Serres's concept of "natural contract." "De la pierre à la chair: sciences et poésie d'Erasmus Darwin à William Blake" deals with poetry confronting the radical otherness of matter. Sophie Laniel-Musitelli explores the advent of a poetics of knowledge in the Romantic age, as the works of Erasmus Darwin and William Blake unveil the harmonious structures of life through poetic form. "Seeking 'True and Unperverted Images of Nature': Humphry Davy's Romantic Geology" also raises the issue of shared forms of knowledge between science, philosophy and literature, as Richard Somerset assesses what becomes of the 18th-century ethos of the writer as moral and spiritual guide to the man of science by analysing the theoretical foundations of an emerging scientific discipline, geology, and its "entanglement" with literature and religion.

The exploration of Humphry Davy's "poetic empiricism" brings us to the question of the sublime as a central concept for the last chapter of the collection, dedicated to **"Romantic Aesthetics."** Our concluding section brings us back to the tradition of Kantian transcendental idealism, more specifically to one of the founding paradigms of Romantic aesthetics as the potential reconciliation of object and subject within the self-reflexive work of art, bringing together chance and determinism, nature and spirit. Fabien Desset's "Wincklemann's Contribution to P. B. Shelley's Philosophy of Art" initiates the move from interdisciplinarity to intermediality, exploring Shelley's aesthetic theory as a place of unresolved tensions between Platonic idealism and political commitment, while in "Theories of the Sublime and the Matter of Pictorial Closure," Hélène Ibata reframes the boundaries of Romanticism. She begins her analysis of the challenge of representing the sublime in Romantic painting in America, in the 1840s, with Thomas Cole, then moves back in time and across the Atlantic to consider Runge, Friedrich, and Turner, thus showing that Romanticism was not only a European phenomenon, but also a Transatlantic adventure, and needs to be viewed as such.

## Romanticism Unbound

The contributions also respond to one another and enter a dialogue with each other across the volume, as we hope the few reading trajectories that we can only sketch here will suggest. The endeavour to search for the **politics of literature**, defined by Jacques Rancière as the way literary texts develop their own political discourse in their own terms and forms, cuts across our collection. Yann Tholoniat explores the invention of a natural contract beyond Rousseau's concept of social contract, while Jennifer Horan works on the political significance of literary genres. She explores the tension between lyric and drama as an opposition between the figural and the gestural that plays a central part in Shelley's meditation on the political efficiency of poetry. Thomas Dutoit's contribution is a vision of "empowered literature" (Swift 1): Heinrich von Kleist's reading of Kantian penal law becomes an act of "*démo-lire*," an experience of democratic freedom through the envisioning of "a world beyond the nation state, beyond political sovereignty, beyond categories or boundaries of property

and belonging," challenging the very foundations of the nation state as it forces us to envisage "a law outside of law." All three contributions engage in delineating the ways in which literary writing effects a new "distribution of the sensible," to borrow Rancière's definition of what politics is about, and thereby contributes to redraw the boundaries of the community and reconfigure our shared common good.

The political problems raised in the contributions emphasise the fact that Romantic writers inherited a series of philosophical problems rather than a body of works. Challenging the notion of influence, our contributors look into **creative modes of inheritance**. John Baker quotes seminal lines from Henry Brooke's *Universal Beauty*: "The social Stream a winding Motion steers, / And mindful of the neighb'ring Region, veers, / With Traverse, or inverted Circuit bends, / Nor leaves, unvisited, remotest Friends" (2. 227-30). Veering becomes a figure for disciplinary crossovers as diversions and excursions, as an experience of pleasure, freedom and invention within the tradition of the philosophical poem, leaving the passive and linear flow of influence to trace new figures through bends and detours. Significantly, to pinpoint Kleist's manipulation of Kant's heritage Thomas Dutoit quotes from Nicholas Royle's *Veering: A Theory of Literature* and reflects on Kleist's use of "Nodism" as a form of intertextuality based on diversion and non-coincidence, leaving room for creativity and uncertainty.

Tilottama Rajan's overture sets the tone for the exploration of Romantic literature and philosophers from **borders and margins**. In her vision of philosophy and its metadisciplinary ambition as a "return to itself from its otherness" (Hegel, quoted in Rajan), confronting its own "unthought" by trying to encompass its margins, philosophy is led to "[think] from the outside." Thomas Dutoit's reading of Kleist hinges on the notion of border as Michael Kohlhaas's place as a foreigner within the state is a way for Kleist to question Kantian philosophy from its margins. John Baker sees the metadisciplinary ambition of the philosophical poems as a "holistic predisposition" which illustrates the passage from the syncretizing ambition of 18$^{th}$-century poetry to the Romantic age as a site of "entanglement." The critique of the Enlightenment mimetic approach to the sublime entails a revolution in pictorial language as Romantic painting

reaches out for the vanishing point in representation in what Hélène Ibata calls "Strategies of unlimitation." Hélène Ibata's contribution on the philosophical significance of the *parergon* in Romantic painting is a fit conclusion to the collection. It offers a vision of Romanticism across borders, encountering its own otherness by confronting its margins, as limits become sites of uncertainty. Focusing on the frame that supplements the work as it "signals the open-endedness of artistic production," it explores the problematic articulation of the finite and the boundless.

Indeed, this collection aims at exploring "Romanticism Unbound," to paraphrase the title of Shelley's major poem *Prometheus Unbound*: it is a study of Romanticism as dynamics of *indefinition*, as a move from the literary absolute to the endeavour to unbind human faculties.

## Works cited

Bowie, Andrew. *From Romanticism to Critical Theory: The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Cave, Terence. *Pré-histoires: textes troublés au seuil de la modernité*. Geneva: Droz, 1999.

—. *Pré-histoires II: langues étrangères et troubles économiques au XVI^e siècle*. Geneva: Droz, 2001.

De Man, Paul. *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1971.

Derrida, Jacques. *De la Grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit, 1967.

Eldridge, Richard. *The Persistence of Romanticism, Essays in Philosophy and Literature*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Holland, Anna, and Richard Scholar, eds. *Pre-histories and Afterlives: Studies in Critical Method*. London: Legenda, 2009.

Kompridis, Nikolas. *Philosophical Romanticism*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Jean Luc Nancy. *L'absolu littéraire: théorie de la literature du romantisme allemand*. Paris: Le Seuil, 1978. *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*. Transl. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester. Albany: State U of New York P, 1988.

Lecler, Eric. *L'absolu et la littérature, du romantisme allemand à Kafka : pour une critique politique*. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013.

McGann, Jerome. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.

Rancière, Jacques. *Politique de la littérature*. Paris: Galilée, 2007. *The Politics of Literature*. Transl. Julie Rose. Cambridge: Polity, 2011.

Royle, Nicholas. *Veering: A Theory of Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011.

Sandy, Mark, ed. *Romantic Presences in the twentieth century*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012.

Serres, Michel. *Le contrat naturel*. Paris: Flammarion, 1992.

Shelley, Percy B. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. Eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistatt. New York and London: Norton, 2001.

Swift, Simon. *Romanticism, Literature and Philosophy: Expressive Rationality in Rousseau, Kant, Wollstonecraft and Contemporary Theory*. London: Continuum, 2006.

Wordsworth, William. *William Wordsworth: The Major Works*. 1984. Ed. Stephen Gill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

# TABLE DES MATIÈRES

Acknowledgements ..... 5

Foreword: Romanticism across Borders
*Thomas CONSTANTINESCO and Sophie LANIEL-MUSITELLI* ..... 7

**OVERTURE**

Smooth and Tangled Systems: Philosophy as Metadiscipline in German Idealism
*Tilottama RAJAN* ..... 19

**PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE IN ROMANTICISM**

Herder, une écriture expressive des singularités
*Claire PAGÈS* ..... 47

Principles of Likeness or Equality (*Gleichheit*) in Kantian Penal Law and International History and in Heinrich von Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*
*Thomas DUTOIT* ..... 69

De la « poésie universelle progressive » à la « communication indirecte » : la présence de la réflexion romantique dans la pensée kierkegaardienne
*Sebastian HÜSCH* ..... 89

**THE POETIC FORMS OF THOUGHT**

Atonement and the Philosophical Poem: Some Affinities between Henry Brooke and William Wordsworth
*John BAKER* ..... 107

The Merry Tinker and the Beautiful Beggars: Wordsworth's Experiments in Poetic Thinking
*Jeremy ELPRIN* ..... 127

Potentiality, Gesturality and the Lyric: A Study of Shelley's *Triumph of Life*
*Jennifer HORAN* ..... 145

## POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, AND KNOWLEDGE

Robert Burns and Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Sensitive Hearts, Big Mouths
*Yann THOLONIAT* ..... 167

De la pierre à la chair : sciences et poésie d'Erasmus Darwin à William Blake
*Sophie LANIEL-MUSITELLI* ..... 185

Seeking "True and Unperverted Images of Nature": Humphry Davy's Romantic Geology
*Richard SOMERSET* ..... 203

## ROMANTIC AESTHETICS

Winckelmann's Contribution to P. B. Shelley's Philosophy of Art
*Fabien DESSET* ..... 225

Theories of the Sublime and the Matter of Pictorial Closure
*Hélène IBATA* ..... 247

List of Illustrations ..... 263

List of Contributors ..... 265