

Romantic Travel: Writing Germany and ‘the North’

A workshop on European cultural transfer around 1800

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Abstracts

Cian Duffy (Lund University)

‘Feldborg the Dane and the Great Belzoni’: some Romantic views of the Danish national character

Scholars of British Romanticism may well remember the curious and somewhat unexpected discussion of the Danes in Matthew Lewis’s novel *The Monk* (1796): a people who are, at least in the opinion of one Spanish nun, ‘a delicate pea-green with flame-coloured hair and whiskers’. Lewis, of course, had some familiarity with Danish folklore, as mediated via German sources. But discussions of the Danish national character actually constitute a surprisingly extensive theme of British eighteenth-century and Romantic-period travel writing about Denmark, spurred both by wider debates reaching back to Montesquieu and Hume but also by more recent revaluations of the close cultural links between the two countries, consequent upon, amongst other things, the antiquarian revival.

This paper explores the writings about the Danish national character by the Danish traveller and anglophile Andreas Andersen Feldborg. Largely forgotten today, Feldborg spent much of the first two decades of the nineteenth century in Britain, where his writings gained him the acquaintance of Nelson and Southey and the praise of *Blackwoods*, which wondered, in September 1821, ‘who is there in Edinburgh or Copenhagen that knows not Feldberg the Dane?’ Feldborg, who published a number of books, in English, about Britain and Denmark, saw himself as a kind of cultural ambassador between the two countries with a mission to shore up cultural relations in the wake of the two British attacks on Copenhagen in 1801 and 1807. His work is particularly concerned to correct what he sees as outdated and inaccurate descriptions of the Danish national character by British travellers – and to aid his cause, he draws on expert testimony from none other than ‘the Great’ Giovanni Belzoni, the celebrated Egyptologist, with whom he spent some time in Copenhagen.

Lis Møller (Aarhus University)

Ballads across Borders

On arriving in Hamburg in September 1798 with plans to spend several months in Germany, S.T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth bought books. Wordsworth acquired a copy of Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, which he had first read while still at school, but had apparently never owned, Coleridge bought Herder’s multinational ballad collection, *Volkslieder*, and both purchased the same edition of August Bürger’s ballads and poems in German. Both poets were already familiar with the English translation of Bürger’s most famous ballad, “Lenore” (based on an English ballad in Percy, translated into German by Herder), and according to Coleridge’s biographer Richard Holmes, the “ballads of Bürger” were one of the things that “drew [Coleridge] like a magnet towards Germany”. Several years later, Wordsworth, in “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” (1815), acknowledged the debt

that he himself and an entire generation of British poets owed to the *Reliques*, yet also pointed out that “Germany” had opened the eyes of British poets to Percy’s ballad collection. At a time when the *Reliques* was still relatively unknown in its home country, “Bürger, and other able writers of Germany, were translating, or imitating, these Reliques, and composing, with the aid of inspiration thence derived, Poems, which are the delight of the German nation”.

The romantic-era ballad revival has been considered in nationalist terms as an instance of the cultivation of one’s national culture. Wordsworth and Coleridge’s book purchases in Hamburg, however, suggest the entangled roots of the ballad revivals in Britain and Germany. Taking as its point of departure the ballad books bought by the two poets, this presentation will explore border-crossing exchanges between Britain and Germany and also include a third region of major importance to both Percy and Herder: Scandinavia.

Annika Bärwald (Bremen University)

‘Exotic’ Entertainment: Romantic Hamburg and Its Domestic Workers and Entertainers of non-European Descent

While citizens of Hamburg had long come into contact with people of non-European descent – both enslaved and free, fictional and real – a new fascination with African and South Asian physicality emerged from the 1790s onward: well-off Hamburg citizens hired and explicitly sought out domestic workers of non-European descent; amusement gardens, cafés, and restaurants featured performances by African dancers as well as by South Asian gymnasts. Concurrently, the city also saw the occasional exhibition of Africans, Asians, and Native Americans as ethnic others. Diverse as these strands are, they point to two aspects of early nineteenth-century Hamburg popular culture that have been largely neglected by historical research thus far. The first regards the significant presence of people of non-European descent living and working in Hamburg in the early nineteenth century. The second pertains to the pervasive notion of the ‘exotic’ – an idea encompassing aesthetics, physical prowess, and popularized anthropological concepts – which significantly shaped how people of non-European descent were perceived, often more so than contemporary abolitionist debates.

In this paper, I highlight the presence of people of non-European descent working in the domestic labor as well as in a broadly defined entertainment sector in Hamburg, ca. 1790-1840. By drawing on printed sources, including advertisements and newspaper reports, I seek to analyze both individuals’ agency and their perception by others. I argue that, amidst a growing interest in methods such as craniology and sustained transnational cultural exchanges, concepts of the ‘exotic’ came to endow Black and Brown bodies with specific aesthetic value. With a premium placed on the perceived enviable (and imitable) physical dexterity of non-European bodies, exoticism, on the one hand, contradicted proto-racist aesthetic hierarchies to some degree. On the other hand, it arguably advanced the development of a western gaze that would underpin the later development of human zoos.

James Vigus (Queen Mary University of London / Hamburg Institute for Advanced Study)

‘The emporium of the world’: observing 1790s Hamburg

After the outbreak of war in 1793 made travel to France dangerous, Hamburg became a new gateway to the European Continent for travellers from Britain. Numerous writers visited or passed through the city: they included Mary Wollstonecraft, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Henry Crabb Robinson, and Charles Parry. Hamburg was, in the words of the travel writer E.D. Clarke, 'a place of [...high] importance [...] Her merchants are princes, and their coffers the emporium of the riches of the world'. As such, the travellers eagerly surveyed it. They were often eager to leave Hamburg again, however, complaining of dirt, bad smells, difficulties with accommodation, and the prevalence of petty swindling. Their stays may generally have been brief, but they were intense, providing opportunities for observing a foreign - and yet in some aspects remarkably familiar - way of life.

This paper analyses a selection of their observations within the four following categories: inns; eating and drinking, including the 'luxury' beverage of tea; music and the theatre; dress and fashion. I seek to compare the British travellers' notes on these matters with other testimonies from the time, including the specialist magazine *Hamburgisches Journal der Moden und Eleganz*. What the chosen categories have in common is that all may be grouped under the rubric of 'consumption'. These travellers exhibited consumer behaviour, beginning with the leisure that enabled them to visit Hamburg in the first place. They also described such behaviour in the people they saw and met, comparing one consumer society (Hamburg) with another (England). My paper draws on the work both of Hamburg historians such as Katherine B. Aaslestad and of theoreticians of consumerism such as Colin Campbell in order to argue that this set of travel accounts amounts to a broadly coherent portrait of a commercial community at a moment of dramatic flux.

Robert Rix (University of Copenhagen)

'The Tavern of the Muses': Hamburg in Jens Baggesen's *The Labyrinth*

This talk will discuss Jens Baggesen's travel book *The Labyrinth* (1792–1793), a classic of Danish Romanticism. I will examine Baggesen's use of the travelogue (the book is about a journey through Germany, Switzerland, and France) as an example of Romantic peregrination. In *The Labyrinth*, the narrator is placed above the narrative. As the title indicates, it is a labyrinthine exploration of the perceiving subject in motion rather than a description of an itinerary with any well-defined aim or direction. The literary baggage Baggesen brought with him was Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* and Rousseau's self-analytical writings. These and many other works inspire him, as he makes his way through Europe at the time of the French Revolution. Taking the Hamburg section of the travel account as my starting point, I will focus on Baggesen's promotion of a particular Romantic brand of cosmopolitanism. Hamburg is the place where he begins to re-evaluate literary tradition: the old role models must fall, while others emerge as important for a new European identity.

Emma Clery (Uppsala University)

Mary Wollstonecraft in 'the whirlpool of gain'

Wollstonecraft's negative view of Hamburg in *Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark* (1796) has been interpreted biographically by most commentators. As she herself hints in the publication and states explicitly in the letters she wrote to her errant lover, the American entrepreneur

and blockade-runner Gilbert Imlay, the failed rendez-vous at the end of her Scandinavian tour was a shattering blow, and informed her revulsion at the 'the chase after wealth' and 'greedy enjoyment of pleasure' in this hub of wartime commerce. Mary Favret, in her 1993 study, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics, and the Fiction of Letters* was perhaps the first to observe the sustained thread of economic ideas in Wollstonecraft's travelogue, and a thoroughgoing examination of feminist anti-capitalist critique in her work is developed by Anthony Pollock in an article 'Aesthetic Economies of Immascultation: Capitalism and Gender in Wollstonecraft's Letters from Sweden' (2011). In this paper I want to broach the precise nature of the commercial activity in the city and region as observed by Wollstonecraft, and in particular her direct knowledge of illicit trade in the context of the French Revolution. She writes in the penultimate letter of the *Short Residence*, 'During my present journey, and whilst residing in France, I have had the opportunity of peeping behind the scenes of what are vulgarly termed great affairs, only to discover the mean machinery which has directed many transactions of moment.' The theatrical metaphor is striking here, but an even more insistent feature of the text is the variety of water imagery. It is in the account of her Northern expedition that she articulated the key principle, 'we reason deeply, when we forcibly feel'. I will therefore also investigate examples of the way in which socio-economic analysis is fused with Romantic apprehension of the natural environment.

Maximiliaan van Woudenberg (Sheridan Institute of Technology)
The German Travel Journals of Charles Parry

Today Charles Parry (1779–1860) is chiefly remembered as one of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's travel companions on the famous Harz Mountains tour in 1799. Parry's significance in literary history and the history of ideas, however, is more than a footnote and should rest on his activities as a Romantic travel-writer. Along with Coleridge, George Bellas Greenough, Thomas Young, and Henry Crabb Robinson, Parry was one of a handful of intercultural mediators of German thought to England in the late-eighteenth century. Parry's observations and activities are meticulously detailed in his journals from 1799-1804, which surprisingly have not received much scholarly analysis.

This paper examines the valuable resource of Parry's German travel journals against the backdrop of Anglo-German travel-writing in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. The first part of the paper examines how the journals document Anglo-German knowledge transfers of German intellectuals such as Professor Blumenbach, and British Romantic figures such as Coleridge, Bertie Greatheed and William Hamilton. The second part of the paper presents an historical reconstruction of German life and Anglo-German travel through a close reading of Parry's descriptions of Hamburg, Göttingen and Dresden. His unique English voice and critical eye expressed in his journal characterise Parry as an intercultural commentator and mediator of German culture, art, and thought, for a British audience. The paper concludes with the suggestion that Charles Parry is a minor figure in British Romanticism worthy of further study within the history of ideas as an intercultural mediator of German thought.