

Romantik

It has often been noted that even during the height of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, which scarred romantic-period Europe, communities of artists, intellectuals, natural philosophers, and others managed to maintain thriving connections across regional and national boundaries even as those boundaries were in the process of being drawn and redrawn. This observation stands at odds with traditional notions of the romantic artist as isolated genius and of romantic cultural productivity as essentially an introspective process, for individuals and for nations. The various European countries may have each had their own version of romanticism, but the idea of nationalism was transnational. The impact of works by J. W. Goethe and Walter Scott or J. M. W. Turner or J. C. Dahl on literary, pictorial, and philosophical developments, for example, is demonstrable, but there is still work to be done on the extensive European network of correspondents, translators, and travellers, who were carriers of romantic culture. Hence, in these days of Brexit and the threat of new fractures in Europe, the study of the romantic period offers us a timely reminder not only of our common cultural heritage but also of the power of cultural activity to transcend division.

Academic responses to the romantic period have, of late, increasingly begun to reflect this fact. Studies of the role played by local, national, and international collaborations during the romantic period are on the rise. So, too, are collaborative studies – often across national boundaries – of various aspects of romanticism. One example is the recent collection of essays, *British Romanticism in European Perspective: Into the Eurozone* (2015), edited by Steve Clark and Tristanne Connolly, in which British romanticism (literature and art) is not seen narrowly, as an insular phenomenon, but emphatically perspectivised in terms of its cosmopolitan integration within European culture.

Romantic nationalisms, in particular, have recently been subjected to critical examination intended to uncover the extent to which various modes of cultural exchange were integral to the nation-building projects of many European countries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Not least important in this process was the relationship between romantic nationalisms and popular, vernacular traditions predating the idea of the nation state.

Many of these developments were explored at the NARS (Nordic Association for Romantic Studies) conference *Rethinking Cultural Memory 1700–1850* held at

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Copenhagen University in December 2015, with the help of funding from the Carlsberg Foundation. The conference brought together scholars from 26 countries and a variety of disciplines to investigate how the cultural and political climate in romantic and post-romantic Europe set out to modernise nations by frantically searching for the traditions of the past. Paradoxically, the legacy of the primitive, vernacular, and often pre-Christian past was recuperated as a means of defining the present. Whether the aim of recovering the past was oriented towards one nation or had a wider transnational scope (such as pan-Scandinavianism or pan-Slavism), the processes of recovering manuscript or oral traditions took place through an extensive network of European connections. Similarly, the remediation of tradition into fashionable poetry and novels in one language more often than not drew on models in other countries. One nexus of agreement among the conference delegates was the need for individual nationalisms to be analysed within a matrix of interlocking exchanges across borders, media, and languages. *Romantik* aims to be a forum for exactly such enquiries into the dynamics of European romanticisms.

The Editors