

Sebastian Domsch, Christoph Reinfandt, and Katharina Rennhak, eds., *Romantic Ambiguities: Abodes of the Modern*. Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2017. Pp. 300. €35.00. ISBN 9783868217278.

This collection of essays looks into ambiguity as an essential feature of Romanticism and how the romantic authors or other writers closely related to this movement have developed different textual strategies to achieve ambiguity within some of their works. In other words, Sebastian Domsch and Katharina Rennhak specify in the Introduction that ‘the contributions to this volume ask what is specifically modern in this cultural idiom, and in how far the modernity of Romanticism depends on ambiguity as a paradigm of modernity as defined in Christoph Bode’s *Ästhetik der Ambiguität*’ (1). Considering ambiguity as a factor that allows multiplicity of interpretations in respect to the texts that embody it, the researchers deal with the distinction between Ambiguity Mark I and Ambiguity Mark II established by Bode and how the analysed texts can fit in the latter, which is the proper ambiguity of modernist literature according to Bode’s perspective. The book is also coherently divided in four sections: Poetry, Non-Fictional Prose, Drama and the Novel, and Afterlives.

Mark J. Bruhn addresses William Wordsworth and the development of self-referentiality and ambiguity with which the meaning and emotional reconstruction partly depends on the reader. Wordsworth is also the topic of Nicholas Halmi’s contribution, which analyses ambiguity in relation to time as it is represented in *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*. Taking a comparative approach, Ralf Haekel insightfully differentiates between the ambiguities of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* to read Miltonic epic as rooted in the spatial concept of contingency in relation to God’s providence and Wordsworth’s autobiographical epic as based on a contingent relationship with immanence. Frank Erik Pointner and Dennis Weißenfels focus on some strategies that Lord Byron evolves to manipulate the reader while blurring life and art, mixing personal characteristics with his fictional narrator and protagonists in some of his works. Finally, Jens Martin Gurr deals with the generated ambiguity of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s considerations of violence in *A Philosophical View on Reform* and *The Masque of Anarchy*, and how this ambivalent and conflicted perspective is developed differently in Shelley’s prose and poetry.

The second section opens with a contribution by James Vigus and his analysis of William Hazlitt’s *On Going a Journey* and his ambiguous concept of liberty. Cian Duffy considers Thomas de Quincey and the ambiguity that arises from evocation of, as well as the lack of referential content that characterises, the Literature of Power. The development in the Romanticism of literary criticism and theory is further explored by Gerold Sedlmayr, who shows the inherent ambiguity that emerges when literary studies adopts a scientific approach to an object beyond science. The reception of Confucius by a selection of Romantic authors is analysed by Peter J. Kitson, who distinguishes between the positive reaction to Confucius during the Enlightenment and the skepticism of many Romantic authors who approached his works.

Frederick Burwick examines how the modern experiences of time breaks radically the unit of time represented in Romantic dramatic works and to reflect upon the ambiguity of temporality. Shelley’s *The Cenci* and its intrinsic ambiguous qualities and ambivalences over ethics and aesthetics is analysed by Michael O’Neill. Angela Esterhammer focuses on the ambiguity of personal identity reflected in James Hogg’s *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The contribution by Martin Procházka focuses on Melville’s novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities* and the ambivalent constitution of the protagonists during their search for truth. This section concerned with Drama and the Novel ends with Ian Duncan’s

reassessment of the relationship between Romanticism, Realism, and Modernism starting through Bode's critical perspective on ambiguity.

The sublime, as defined by Edmund Burke, and its relationship to Bode's theory of ambiguity is studied by Pascal Fischer, who regards the sublime as a category of ambiguous features that extend beyond mimesis. Mirosława Modrzewska and Stanisław Modrzewski explain how Joseph Conrad's fiction considers the ontological instability of the world through a perspective based on Cartesian-Newtonian and Kantian ideas. Sabrina Sontheimer's article deals with illustrated versions of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and how they ambiguously confront the proper ambivalence of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem. The contribution by Stefanie Fricke studies Jane Austen's *First Impressions* and *Pride and Prejudice* to evince the ambiguity generated by her use of an omniscient narrator to blend ambiguously together fiction and reality. This volume as a whole identifies ambiguity as a vital basis for the paradigm of communication that determines Romanticism and its persistently contemporary continuity.

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