

Vanishing Points: The Heterotopia of the Romantic Book

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This article aims to establish a set of interdisciplinary practices to identify the uniqueness of Romantic books in particular and bibliographic change more generally. It argues that when we take into account the book at a synaesthetic level, we see a new relationship to the book emerging during the Romantic period that converges around the production of “vanishing points.” Reading is no longer framed as something utopian, as in a medieval or early-modern tradition (from Dante to More), but instead as heterotopian, as the production of some outside within. Heterotopia, I argue, becomes the condition through which new kinds of knowledge formation as well new kinds of mediation become possible, up to and including the non-book. The Romantic book marks the beginning of the theorization of the book’s end.

Things liberate one from surveillance and . . . observation frees one from suspicion. Sciences that are not acquainted with objects can only rely on sleuthing and policing. (Michel Serres, *The Five Senses* 42)

Is there such a thing as a Romantic book? This is the question I want to ask in my remarks today, one that I pose with a great deal of caution. The aim of my first book, *Dreaming in Books*, after all, was to argue that the significance of Romantic bibliographic culture rested in the marked differentiation of types of books and the types of reading that they helped make possible.¹ Nevertheless, if we wish to situate this problem in diachronic rather than synchronic terms, it strikes me as useful to be able to identify a set of features that potentially characterized the book during the Romantic period, broadly understood to span the years from the early 1790s to the late 1830s. What might define the Romantic book’s *difference* from that which came before and after?

If we survey the literature on the topic, the first answer we come up with is: not much. While Philip Gaskell’s *Introduction to Bibliography* and a number of other handbooks use the date 1800 to signify a major bibliographic break between the hand-press era and new industrial technological inventions such as the steam press and the paper machine, we do not witness the widespread adoption of these and other like technologies until near the end of what we traditionally identify as the Romantic period. Not much actually changes about how books were made during the period. One could argue, as numerous quantitative historians have done, that the unique feature of Romantic book culture was indeed quantitative (Hesse; Allen;

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Ward; Raven and Garside). What we see happening in the last quarter of the eighteenth century is a marked increase in the relative number of titles and volumes being produced from year to year, a trend that proceeds largely unabated throughout the century (indeed until today). While fears of there being too much to read are almost as old as the book – as Pliny the Younger remarked in the first century CE, “Read much, not many” (27) – there does seem to be a widespread conviction during the Romantic era that a reading revolution was indeed underway. Surplus, excess, and proliferation – these must be at least some of the terms in which we think about the meaning of the Romantic book. Finally, William St. Clair has argued for the significance of legal constraints as a defining feature of Romantic bibliographic culture. Changes in copyright law led to major changes in publishers’ lists, which in turn led to major changes in what readers could read. According to St. Clair, there was something like a content revolution during the Romantic period.

For most of these studies, then, whatever differences are posited to emerge within Romantic bibliographic culture, few if any are thought to affect the book as a material object. Romantic books are not imagined to be as bibliographically unique in quite the same way, say, as the Gutenberg Bible, Aldine editions, the standardization of the Renaissance folio, or the introduction of paperbacks in the twentieth century. Nor are they indices of new modes of production, to which their more iconic material predecessors bear witness. And yet for Romantic readers there was a profound sense of change occurring within their culture of communication, one that was far-reaching in both time and space.

What I want to do in my remarks today is reframe the question, not in the more familiar terms of enumerative or descriptive bibliography, but instead in *aesthetic* terms, and ask to what extent a particular visual-discursive paradigm emerges in books during the Romantic period, one that opens up new ways of seeing and thinking about the world. My interest is in developing a more complex metric of how we think about bibliographic change than we have traditionally employed – one less reliant on formats, inventors, or inventions, singular people like Gutenberg or Stanhope, or singular technologies like the folio, the press, or the paper-machine, which after all are themselves aggregates of numerous smaller technologies or communities.² Instead, I am interested in bringing together a three-fold perspective on books, one that would consist of: (a) a traditional bibliographical approach, including questions about such things as typeface, page layout, binding, and size; (b) an art historical interest in illustration and the visual culture in which books participate; and (c) literary concerns about how books speak to readers as media principally, though not exclusively, concerned with the communication of the written word. My aim is to expand the range of ways we have thought about books’ meaningfulness to readers over time.

The argument I want to make here is that when we consider the book at this synaesthetic level, when we account for the myriad types of books and bibliographic spaces, what we see emerging during the Romantic period is a new relationship to the book that converges around the production of what I would like to call “vanishing points” – by which I mean not some ungraspable, utopian elsewhere beyond the book, but a hollow or *Leerstelle* within the book itself.³ Romantic books are about the production of some outside within. Romantic books are heterotopian.

Readers will know that I am drawing on the early work of Foucault, whose essay “Of Other Spaces” tries to lay out the idea of heterotopian space, which he refers to as “those spaces which are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the others” (24). For Foucault these were spaces like prisons, mental institutions,

and, interestingly, retirement homes (to my knowledge Foucault never tackled aging as a contradictory human space, but it is certainly a suggestive idea and ever more relevant today). But equally important to my thinking is the etymology of the word, the way heterotopia is first introduced in an evolutionary-biological context. As Ernst Haeckel would write in *The Evolution of Man* (1879),

The kenogenetic vitiations of the original, palingenetic incidents of evolution depend in great measure on a gradually occurring displacement of the phenomena, which is effected in the course of many thousands of years by adaptation to the changed conditions of embryonic existence. This displacement may effect either the place or the time of the phenomena. If the former, it is called Heterotopy; if the latter, Heterochrony. (12)

Heterotopy for Haeckel signals a displacement of the normal functioning of some system. It does so in the form of kenogenesis, a weakening of the system. But in an evolutionary context, displacement and endangerment become the very conditions of selection and change, and thus development. Physiological pathology is tied to progression as much as to extinction. Where for Foucault heterotopian spaces showed us something about the inner logic of human society as a whole (what Foucault termed their “juxtaposition”), for Haeckel they mark the disturbances and lacunae of a system through which new forms can take shape.

The heterotopia of the Romantic book, I want to suggest, lies neither exclusively in the mirroring function given to it by Foucault, nor in the sense of an absolute negativity in the form of the much valorized non-sense of Romantic knowledge (Menninghaus). Rather, heterotopy is the condition of an opening-up to otherness, to foreign knowledge within; it marks a displacement in a more literal sense. Heterotopy is the condition through which new kinds of knowledge formation as well as new kinds of mediation become possible, up to and including the non-book. To read the bibliographic hollow of the Romantic book is in one sense to chart out a media archaeology of Foucault’s own notion of heterotopia. But it is also, in another sense, to locate the beginning of the theorization of the end of the book, of the book’s own kenogenesis.

Horizons

Romantic books repeatedly attempt to render the vanishing point of reading visible. They do so, above all else, through the genre of the picturesque. Like all attempts at making a negativity present, they perform this gesture repetitively, compulsively, banally. *Travels In ...*, *A Voyage Round ...*, *Picturesque Tour Through ...*, *Views Of ...* – these are just some of the many titles permeating the Romantic book market within this genre that are also so many ways of representing the same thing.⁴ One need only substitute a particular place (Troy, London, India, Russia, Canada, or the Rhine) and a particular object (steeple, river, peak, ruin, a bunch of natives) in order to capture the general experience of bibliographic encounter that these books are meant to frame: that of escape. Whether it is the interior of a cathedral or a mountain pass, “la plaine d’Arques” or a riverbed of Salzburg, one sees constraint, recess, and turn at every turn of the page, remediations of the book’s own paginal architecture.⁵ One sees the trope of reading.

Consider, for example, plate 78 of Charles Nodier’s *Voyages Pittoresques et Romantiques dans l’ancienne France* [Picturesque and Romantic Voyages in Ancient France] (1820), where the viewer is not only doubled (twice) in the image,



Fig. 1 Charles Nodier, ed., *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France* (1820)

but so too is the constraint of the ruin's arch. As it proliferates down the winding visual pathway of the picture's plane (within a secondary ruin consisting of numerous archways), it reappears again within nature, this time turned on its side in the ubiquitous form of the river's bend. The cultural bow of the ruined archway is mirrored in the natural bow of the winding river, itself only visible through a disappearing white line, that is, as the negation of the negation of print. The sign of the vanishing point itself vanishes here, available only in relief through the inked, tree-lined peninsula that stands behind it (another set of bowed forms). Unlike the insularity of the island, the peninsula or half-island (*Halbinsel* in German) is the Romantic form of this unknowable leading-on, what Ludwig Tieck would call in *William Lovell*, "the last border of all sensibility [die letzte Grenze alles Empfindbaren]" (124).

Indeed, as Cynthia Wall has argued, the technique of description in the Romantic novel is designed to take us both out and in, to perform this very material vanishing that belongs to the visual picturesque.⁶ Such description brings us into a world not of emblematic things, so characteristic of the early-modern world, nor of singular, taxonomic things that belonged to the Enlightenment, but instead into vectorial things – things that are also forces. Consider the vitality of the curtain in Poe, the ventriloquial automat in Hoffmann, the storied "cairn" in Scott, or the almighty flute in Jean Paul. As Balzac writes of his despondent hero in *La Peau de Chagrin* [The Wild Ass's Skin] (1831) as he enters the famed curiosity shop teeming with goods, "He left real life behind him, ascended by degrees to an ideal world, and reached the enchanted palaces of ecstasy where the universe appeared to him in transitory gleams and tongues of fire [en traits de feu]" (*Wild Ass's Skin* 35; *La Peau* 70). No matter how many objects surround the Romantic viewer (porcelain soup-tureens, portraits of French aldermen, quaint pistols, an Indian idol), their telos is always eventually to turn to metaphor ("traits de feu"), to disappear before one's eyes. The surplus of things stands for the surplus of Romantic thinghood.

Medial Edges

Alongside new ekphrastic techniques of verbal visualization, the Romantic period also saw the emergence of new visual tools to capture these boundaries of sense perception, such as aquatint and lithography (although aquatint was a rediscovery of an older technique that had become newly meaningful). Where the lithograph was a sign for Walter Benjamin of the coming speed of representation – a *daily*ness that would change who and what could be represented – the lithograph, like the aquatint, was also deeply invested in capturing the *absence* of boundaries. It was one of the primary tools of representing a new poetics of the atmospheric, such as clouds, heat, shadows, gas, or oriental genies. Unlike the distinctiveness of engraving, the governing concerns of these new visual tools sought to capture a sense of the edge not only as though it were alive, as vitally dynamic, but also as potentially transformable, as that which led us elsewhere.

This was no less true for the vogue of outline drawings, or *Schattenrisse*, that began with Flaxman and populated Romantic books in ever greater numbers. The outline, one of the ultimate signs of a binary, was increasingly used in the service of transposition and translation, of becoming something else. The Romantic obsession with the arabesque was one such example: materials came alive and margins entered into the page's interior frame. But so too was the sound figure of Chladni's acoustic research, where the outline stood for an intermedial encounter, in which sound could become image. How could one form of communication become another, what were the

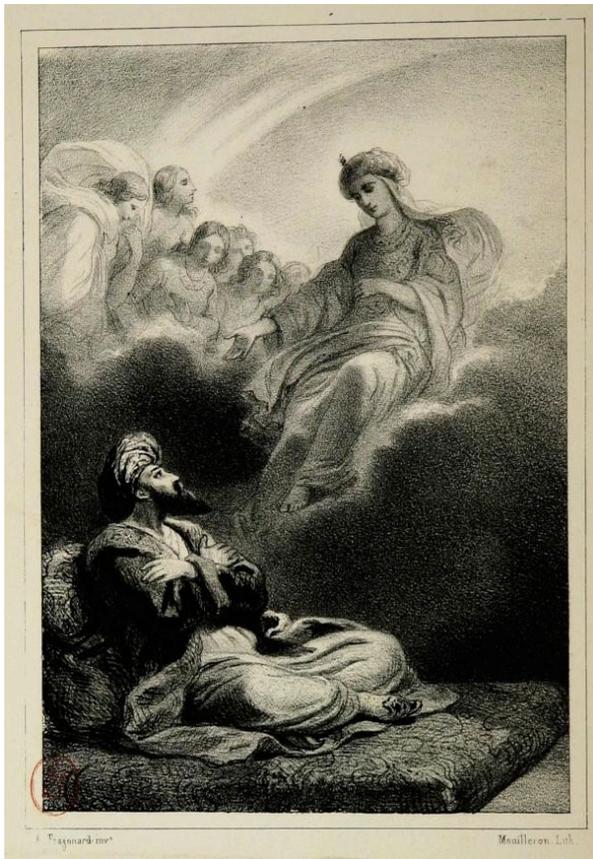


Fig. 2 *Les divines féeries de l'Orient et du Nord* (1843)



Fig. 3 Eugen Neureuther, *Randzeichnungen zu Goethes Balladen und Romanzen* (1829)

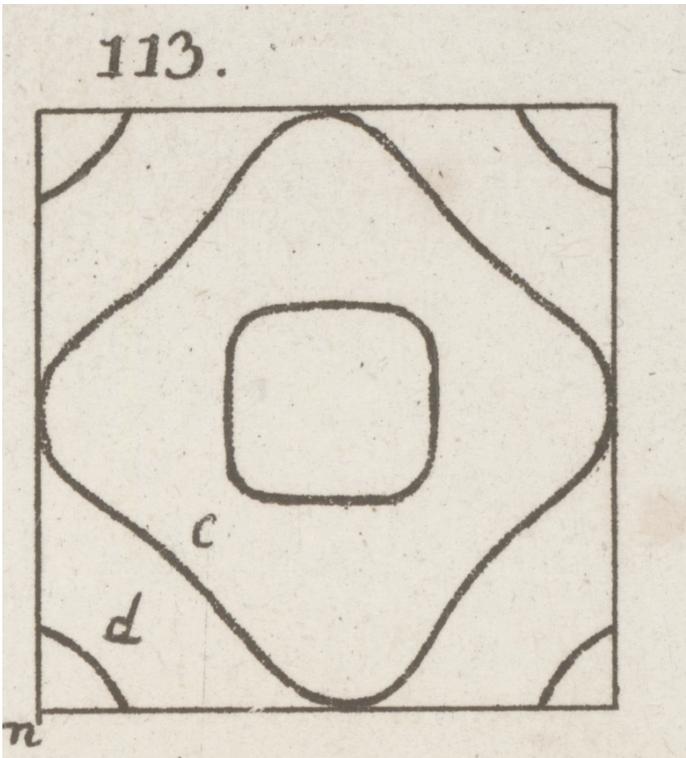


Fig. 4 E.F.F. Chladni, *Entdeckungen über die Theorie des Klanges* (1787)

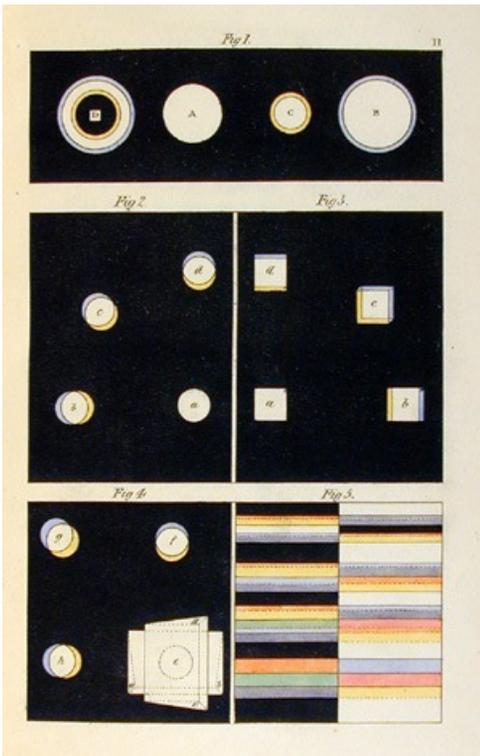


Fig. 5 J.W. Goethe, *Farbenlehre* (1810)

points of contact, and what did these zones of liminality look like? These were the urgent concerns of the Romantic age, as *conversion* emerged as a hallmark of this new intermedial-visual poetics. Goethe's *Farbenlehre* [Theory of Colors] (1810), in which one could observe over the course of several hundred experiments the dynamism of the visual edge, was in many ways this effort's handbook, but so too were works like Jean Paul's *Vorschule der Ästhetik* [Preschool for Aesthetics] (1804), which, as Sean Franzel has shown, was an extended reflection on the media genre of the lecture, print's outer edge. The vanishing point of the book was, in this context, the starting point of another register of mediation.

Intercalation

Few developments were more important to the visual culture of Romanticism than the emergence of the stratigraphical map (Piper, "Mapping Vision"). Embodied in projects like Georges Cuvier and Alexandre Brongniart's *Essai sur la Géographie Mineralogique des Environs de Paris* [Essay on the Mineralogical Geography of the Environs of Paris] (1811), William Smith's *A Delineation of the Strata of England and Wales* (1815), or Christian Keferstein's *Teutschland Geognostisch-geologisch Dargestellt* [Germany Geognostically-geologically Represented] (1821), these works and the spread of popular atlases to which they belonged increasingly framed the world in more temporalized and discontinuous terms than ever before. Where the early-modern rise of cartography in Europe had been driven in large part by the discovery of new territories, the new world of Romantic cartography was conceived as an underworld. In place of the static overview of the cartographic grid, the stratigraphical map put on display the discontinuous layers that were contained beneath the earth's surface, out of view. It translated the hazy vanishings of the picturesque into the compacted and layered sediments below. The crucial question that the stratigraphical map asked was how the map of space could become the map of time. As first Haeckel, and then later Foucault, understood, the spatial condition of heterotopia, of this outside within, carried with it an inherent temporal discontinuity as well, a heterochrony or dis-temporalization. The question became what were to be the new representational techniques to bring into view the heterochronic structures of the underneath.

Cartographic experiments such as Alexander von Humboldt's "Tableau physique" from his *Essai sur la Géographie des Plantes* [Essay on the Geography of Plants] (1807), with its integration of different types of representation, from the landscape view, to the textualized topology, to the tabular chart, was one such example of how to account for this new sense of a stratified world; but so too, as Jonathan Sachs has shown, were the scalar experiments of William Playfair's historical charts, where information was relativized and thus made relationally contingent to that which surrounded it ("Scales of Time"). Unlike the early-modern atlas, there was no longer a stable, absolute referent that lay behind the informational map. Playfair's charts were part of a broader suite of statistical maps, tabular representations of *Staatskräfte* (political resources such as population, terrain, and industry), as well as diagrammatic reconstructions of recent military actions that attempted more abstract representations of asynchronous spatial developments during the Romantic period (and we should recall that "evolution" initially referred to a military maneuver before it meant species change).

On a domestic level, stratigraphy, or the writing of material discontinuities, would take the form of the increasingly popular genre of the album with its cut-outs and

paste-ins (Le Men; Tucker, Ott, and Buckler). Unlike the commonplace book, with its claims to reproducing a discursive totality, the album reframed readers' gleanings as layers of material remnants. The cut-out was an act of heterotopy, a material instantiation of de Certeau's notion of reading as poaching. Unlike the interleaving that belonged to the medieval manuscript book, always potentially enlargeable and yet always claiming a cosmology unto itself, the album was the stratigraphical register of the discontinuous internalizations (and displacements) of Romantic reading.

If these were so many bibliographic manifestations of a new attention to the below and the inter, to *sediment*, one could see its discursive equivalent in the theoretical priority of translation during the Romantic period – a way of internalizing the foreign without a sense of digestion. For writers like Sophie Mereau or Felicia Hemans, translation was a means of existing in a liminal state of textual ownership, hovering between temporally and spatially distinct authorial registers and voices. For Goethe it was paraphrase, as a kind of speaking outside, that would emerge during his late career as a privileged rhetorical device for thinking custodially about language, of preserving ever greater degrees of heterogeneity, heteronomy, and heterochrony within one's own speech (Piper, "Paraphrasis"). For E. T. A. Hoffmann, on the other hand, it was the whisper that served as the preferred communicative mode through which some internal yet unpossessable discourse could be represented. The whisper was the sign of a narratological exteriority that existed alongside a phonemic interiority. The whisper stood for an expansive communicative underworld.

Blueprint

The increasing popularity of atlases and albums thus marked out a growing interest in structural *precedent* during the Romantic period, but they did so at the level of abstraction, of how to make visible the no longer available to view. In this, they embodied something like a diagrammatic turn.⁷ This interest in structure, indeed we could more properly speak of *infrastructure* here, also took the form of the "not yet," whether in the form of the sketch, the outline, or the *Grundriss* (ground plan or blueprint). While the term "blueprint" would not come into use until Alphonse Louis Poitevin's discovery of the light sensitivity of ferro-gallate in 1861 (which turns blue upon exposure), books of architectural plans, as Daniel Purdy has shown, became increasingly widespread by the turn of the nineteenth century, from Schinkel's collection of architectural drawings (*Sammlung Architectonischer Entwürfe* [Collection of Architectonic Sketches] [1825]) to the monumental nineteen-volume record of Napoleon's team of *savants* in Egypt (*Description de L'Egypte* [1809–1822]). Often accompanying picturesque tours, the proliferation of architectural plans shows how Romantic bibliographic visuality consisted of a combination of the landscape view, the serial view, and the overview within a single material object. Romantic visuality was perspectival, not in the sense of a basic three-dimensionality, but in a more cumulative sense, as the synthesis of multiple ways of looking. This technique would be masterfully combined in Stendhal's illustrated autobiography, *Vie de Henry Brulard* (1835), but so too in works like Amalia Schoppe's *Erinnerungen aus Meinem Leben in Kleinen Bildern* [Memories from my Life in Small Images] (1838), which deployed the visual tableau as its organizing aesthetic device. Romantic autobiography emerged as the summation of perspective, a thoroughgoing engagement with the opticality of writing life.

For Foucault, the mirror was one of the principal means by which heterotopias were to be theorized. A mirror image was a copy, but also an inversion, as well as an unstable



Fig. 6 Christian Keferstein, *Teutschland geognostisch-geologisch dargestellt* (1821)

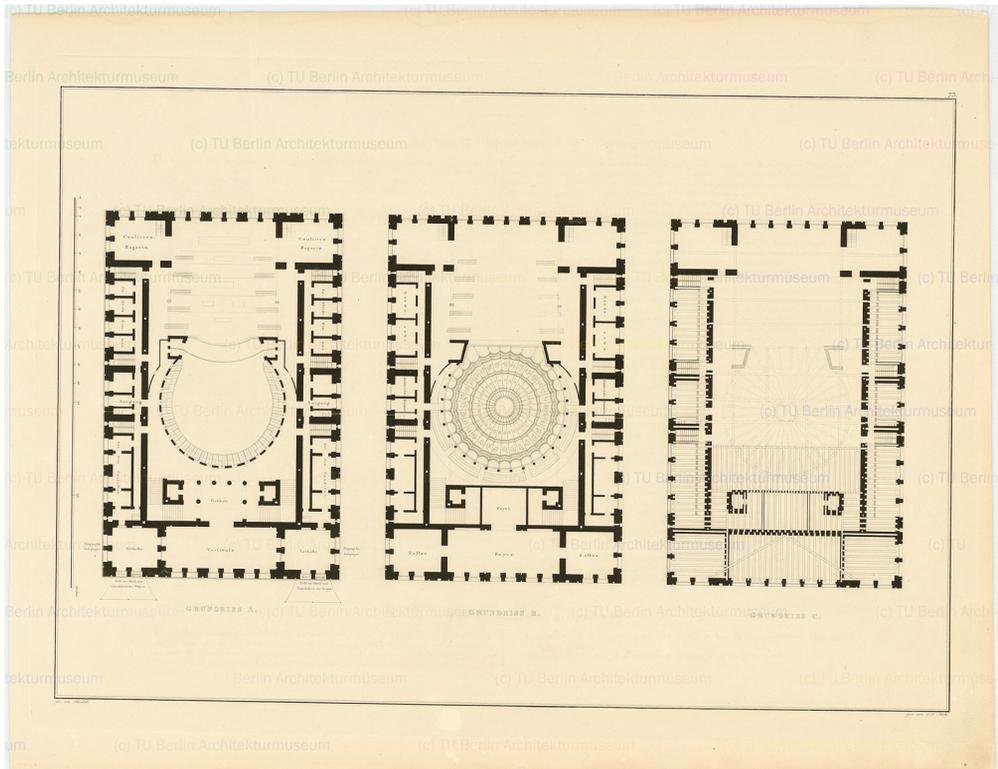


Fig. 7 Carl Friedrich Schinkel, *Sammlung architectonischer Entwürfe* (1821-26)

projection, a negativity. For a variety of Romantic writers, the mirror was not simply a metaphor for sameness, for that which appeared again. Instead, the reproducibility and polarity that belonged to the mirror were the conditions of imagining how novelty was brought forth in the world, the very condition of futurity. This logic combined the principle of reproducibility with that of generativity. The Romantic copy created.

One could see this idea at work in new optical devices from the period, from the entoptic apparatus first pioneered by Etienne Louis Malus and later brought to Weimar by Thomas Seebeck to David Brewster's kaleidoscope, which relied on the multiple mirroring of light to bring into view the never before seen (Piper, "Egologies"). It was on view in bibliographic terms in the use of so-called "mirror prints" in architectural books, such as Georg Moller's *Bemerkungen über die Aufgefundene Originalzeichnung des Domes zu Koeln* [Observations on the Discovered Original Sketches of the Cologne Cathedral] (1818), as well as in the rise of prominent Romantic print genres such as the "critical edition." With its heavy reliance on a bifurcated page, one that mirrored itself, the critical edition was divided between the text proper and the increasingly dense scholarly apparatus of footnotes or end matter that reproduced the infrastructure of a text's transmission rather than generations of commentary. Where early-modern editions were marked by a superfluity of voices exterior to and surrounding the text, the Romantic critical edition was marked by a vanishing generativity – the more the editor receded from the text and into the mirror of the apparatus, the more the novelty of the author could reveal itself in all its splendor. Romantic attention to heterotopia was also simultaneously an attention to the infrastructures of mediation.

Manuals

Ever since Augustine's famous conversion, in which the divine voice exhorted him to "take it and read, take it and read," the book's tactility, its being "at-hand," has been integral to the history of its meaning. And ever since the invention of print, there has been a sense of anxiety surrounding the place of handwriting and the manual production of words within this mechanical universe. The hand is what seems to vanish from the mass-produced book. But, as Peter Stallybrass argues, print was not just a usurper of handwriting, it was also a great producer of it. Alongside the vogue for marginalia in the Romantic period (see Jackson), a variety of other bibliographic tactics would emerge that were designed to produce handwriting within printed books. Whether it was the rise of printed inscription pages, diary pages, calendars, and almanacs, or the reproduction of handwriting through the foldout facsimile within printed editions, handwriting emerged as print's vanishing point during Romanticism, its incorporated exteriority. It is not so much a sign of the more familiar notion of remediation, where print is made to look like manuscript, as in the case of the Gutenberg Bible and other print incunables; rather, it points towards an outside that is both within and disappearing, a dissipatory interiority. It signals a changing physiological relationship to reading.

The hand's increasing sense of reticulated exteriority to the book gives rise to a number of interactive manuscriptural practices during the Romantic era; as Blanchot has argued, the popularity of the unpublished notebook becomes print's mirror image, its becoming an idea. And, as Michelle Levy has shown, manuscript books were also part of a larger economy of writing, whether before, alongside, or after print. Where notebooks were often imagined to be forms of immediacy (swift and messy) in relation to the time and regularity of print (slow and stable), one could

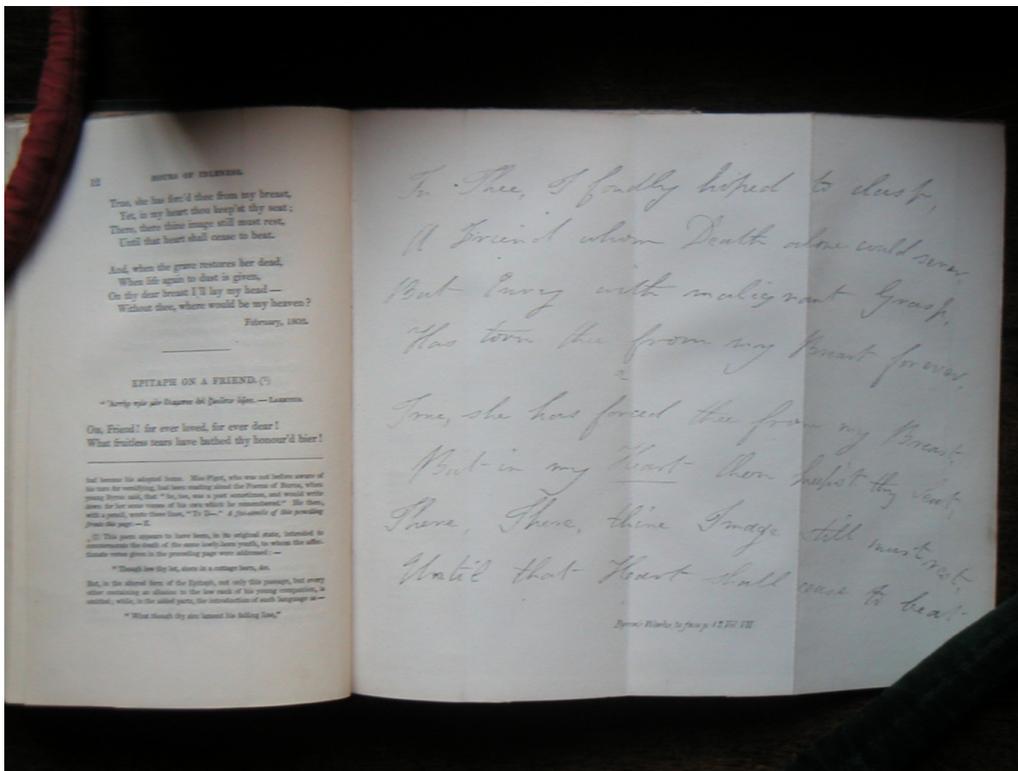


Fig. 10 The Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals (1832)

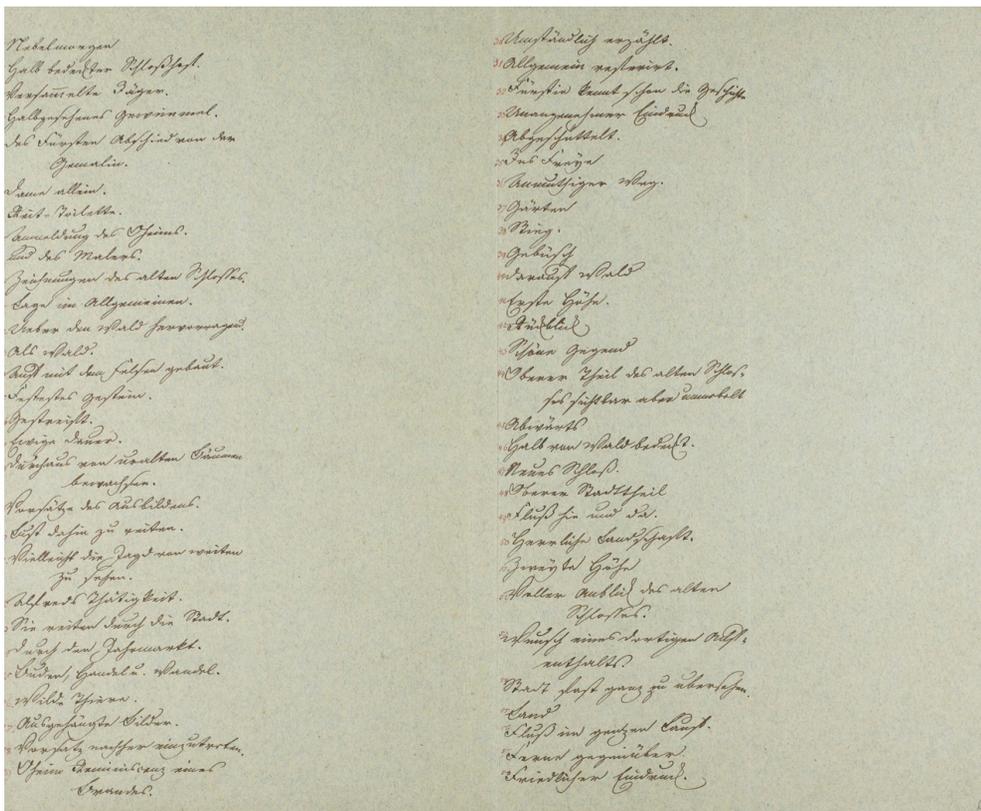


Fig. 11 J.W. Goethe, Notes to "Novelle," GSA 25 W1992

also witness the opposite impulse to highlight manuscript's formal identity in relation to print's transience in the form of handwriting's increasing archival status. As Andrew Stauffer suggests elsewhere in this issue, nineteenth-century books were and continue to be more closely akin to trash, while handwriting was elevated to the status of a cult object. Consider, for example, a sheet from Goethe's archive (GSA 25/W1992, Bl. 5), in which he had his scribe record 107 keywords that would serve as the basis of the last novella he would write in his life and which were reproduced in exquisite formality, including folds down the middle of the sheet's two halves. The folded, dictated, and handwritten sheet is a sign of irreproducibility, what the printed book *cannot* reproduce, but also the condition of its possibility. It is a sign of the growing importance of the *archive* as a generative node within the economy of print, one that produces itself in reproduction – not just in the rise of the number of posthumous volumes (as opposed to editions) that belonged to an author's corpus, what Michael Gamer has called “recollections,” but also epitextually in the popular genre of “conversations with,” those printed records of manuscriptural notes of oral encounters with famous writers. The manuscript archive, like the scientific experiment and the architectural blueprint, becomes a machine for making future texts. The archive, and the writing that belongs to it, is not conceived archetypally (in the more familiar Romantic sense), but rather prototypically in its ability to establish the *protocols* through which writing reproduces itself in the future.

The Book of Life

This brings me to my final category and back to the evolutionary-biological origins of the notion of heterotopia with which I began. One of the most decisive outcomes of this broad array of bibliographic, visual, and discursive tactics was the way it contributed to the emergence of new modes of knowledge, in particular the new science of life, arguably the science of sciences in the Romantic period (as Denise Gigante has shown in her marvelous study, *Life*). To talk about life was necessarily to talk about the limits of representation, to imagine a medium that could account for its own exteriorities. In physics it initially took the form of reconceptualizing the electrical basis of Galvani's *Lebenskraft* as an electro-chemical process in the work of Humboldt, Ritter, Volta, and Davy. The closed electrical circuit, like the great chain of being, was transformed into an unstable scene of reactivity, a normalization of the pathological. Later, in the work of Oersted, Seebeck, and Faraday, it would take the form of thinking through the multiplicity of compound forces, questions about how heat, magnetism, and electricity all potentially resided within one another.

In the field of botany, in particular in the work of people like Augustin de Candolle, it was a question of trying to imagine a system based on the absolute heterogeneity of the system to itself, the sense in which the organic could never acquire the status of a totality. Where, for de Candolle, inorganic bodies were premised on a notion of juxtaposition, organic bodies relied on a system of “intus-susception,” a kind of reticulation (7). The point was not that “all was leaf,” as in Goethe's earlier axiomatic statement, but that the leaf was never entirely self-identical. Such insights would lead, among other things, to the prioritization of the study of fungi during the period, as in the work of Christian Nees von Esenbeck, director of the Bonn Botanical Garden and author of the authoritative and beautifully illustrated handbook *Das System der Pilze und Schwämme* [The System of Fungi and Sponges] (1817). For Esenbeck and others, the fungus was an edge that captured an essence, in much the same way that the

infusoria delineated the negative boundary between plant and animal. The fungus was a vegetal form considered to be both gaseous (i.e., a different state altogether) and also the sign of a living-on of the plant *in* death. The study of fungus was one of many fields in which Romantic natural scientists were working out what Carl Gustav Carus would later call “relative death” – the idea that one of the fundamental features of Romantic life was that it contained death within itself (2). The hardening of the bone from without the soft tissue of nerves and blood was, in the field of osteology, one such sign of this relative death in life, just as Carus’s use of predictive geometry to account for all possible skeletal forms, to map the shape of organic things to come, was a way of understanding its opposite, of theorizing life within death.

As these examples show, there was a circularity to Romantic life that made it impossible to ever fully account for itself, much like Geoffroy St. Hilaire’s attempts to argue for the similarity of vertebrates and invertebrates by suggesting that they were merely the developmental inversion of one another in his *Principes de Philosophie Zoologique* [Principals of Philisophical Zoology] (1830). Tautology emerged as the condition of system openness. Whether it took the form of writers’ autobiographies that began to flood the market or natural scientific treatises from a broad array of fields that were all contending with what it meant for something to be “alive,” Romantic books reproduced over and over again de Candolle’s notion of “intus-susception” as the basis of life, a consistent normalization of a set of representational practices for conceptualizing that which inwardly exceeded representability. As Goethe would remark on the meaning of the word *gegenständlich* [objective] in his natural scientific periodical, “I found that my entire method rested on the act of derivation [*Ableiten*]” (596). The study of life for Goethe conjoined the tripartite acts of inspection, retrospection, and circumspection, suggesting that life was always in the end a form of esoteric knowledge. It thus contained within itself the category of error or misprision, a basic absence of finality to its knowability. As Nietzsche would write in this post-Romantic vein, “All life rests on appearance, art, deception, optics, the necessity of perspective and error” (1: 12).

This conception of life, born from the Romantic book and the type of reading it subtended, was perhaps captured most succinctly on a single leaf from Stendhal’s autobiography that contained the word “Life” (in English) at the top of an otherwise empty page. Foreign and blank, and yet still there only ever as hypothesis: this becomes the condition of modernity’s literary and scientific poles – biology and biography, knowing and representing life – which the book can no longer adequately contain. As a page of a book to come, it eloquently renders the terms of the book’s own pending silence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jon Klancher for the thought-provoking exchange on Romantic book culture that proved an inspiration for this piece.

Notes

1. This talk is intended as a resumé of my past and current research as well as new work coming out of the field by a number of scholars. For a recent showcase of such work, see the forthcoming special issue of *RaVoN* devoted to Romantic print cultures (Piper and Sachs).

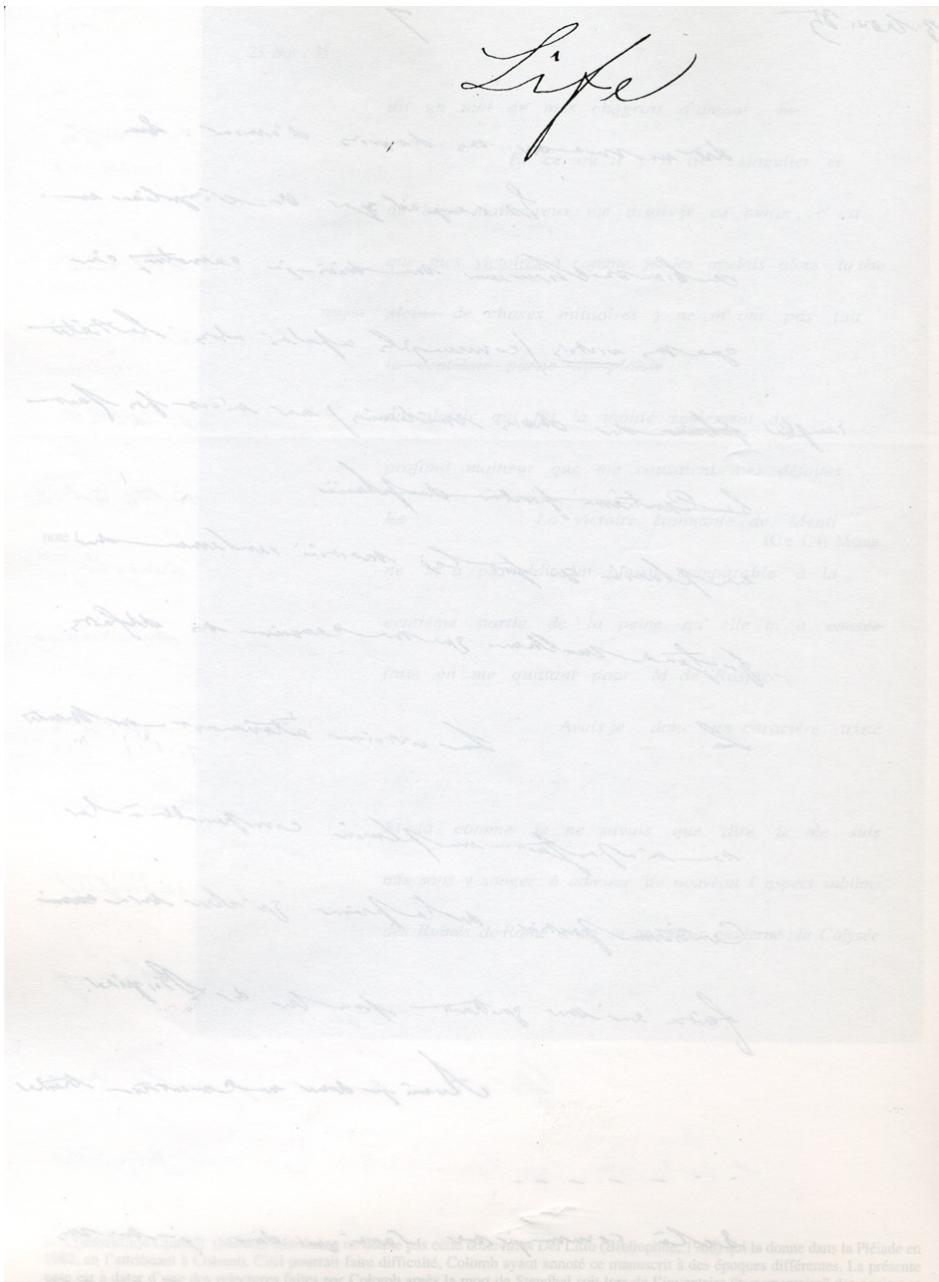


Fig. 12 Stendhal, *Vie de Henry Brulard* (1835)

2. I am drawing here on the work of Lisa Gitelman, who makes this argument for the history of media more generally.
3. I want to add here just how much my thinking about the lacuna in the Romantic book is indebted to Jon Klancher's *The Making of English Reading Audiences*, a work that was really the first to explicate the implications of the crisis of address that marked the growing schism between reader and writer in the Romantic period's increasingly commercial bibliographic environment. That schism, I want to argue, is reinscribed in the bibliographic poetics of the hollow that comes to characterize the Romantic book. For further consideration of the intersections of modern commercialism and the Romantic book, see Ferris and Keen; Franta.
4. For recent work on the genre of the view, tourism, and Romantic poetry, see Fulford. For a history of the Romantic horizon line, see Koschorke. And for work on the relationship between technology and the picturesque, see Broglio.
5. An earlier version ("preprint") of this essay, including illustrations, can be found at the author's website: <http://piperlab.mcgill.ca/articles.html>.
6. As Gilpin writes in his essays on the picturesque, "It descends not to the minutiae of objects. The fringed bank of the river – the Gothic ornaments of the abbey – the chasms, and the fractures of the rock, and castle – and every little object along the vale, it pretends not to delineate with exactness" (87–88).
7. For a discussion of the diagram as it relates to Foucault, see Deleuze (21–38).

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