

Leitfaden für Abschlussberichte DFG-Villa Vigoni-Gespräche

1. Allgemeine Angaben

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Thema des Projekts:

Re-Discovering the 'Other': A Close Re-Reading of Literary Constructions of Italy in Canonical and Non-Canonical Texts of British Romantics

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2. Arbeits- und Ergebnisbericht (max. 10 DIN A4-Seiten)

Ausgangsfragen und Zielsetzung des Projekts.

From 11 to 15 April 2016, the Villa Vigoni was the picturesque backdrop of Romantic scholarly interest, debate and academic exchange. International experts in the field of Romanticism from Germany (Vechta, Hamburg, Göttingen, Dortmund and Koblenz) and Italy (Bologna, Parma, Siena and Cassino) addressed the (controversial) question of

Romantic images, legends and myths of Italy at the symposium *Re-Discovering the 'Other': A Close Re-Reading of Literary Constructions of Italy in Canonical and Non-Canonical Texts of British Romantics*. (Mis-)constructions and distortions of Italy were seen both through the lenses of British Romantic literature and the visual arts. The symposium pursued two major aims: one was the discussion of canonical writers and their lesser known works, the other was the re-discovery of writers and their artistic output that had hitherto received little critical attention, and, more often than not, had sunk into oblivion.

Thus, it was canonical British Romantic writers, such as William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and Percy B. Shelley and non-canonical and even forgotten Romantics alike such as Felicia Hemans, Lady Morgan, William Beckford, Samuel Rogers, and Mary Shelley who dedicated their poetry and prose to the representation of Italy from diversified perspectives, considering Italy not so much a physical place as a site highly charged with symbolic, ideological and aesthetic meaning. This attempt at remapping and renegotiating the Romantic canon (with reference to one topic) was undertaken as a first step to the Vechta conference in May 2017 ('The Lost Romantics: The Unknown Significance of Non-Canonical Writers for British Romanticism') which will both intensify the collaboration with the Italian universities and establish a network of German-Italian Romantic studies within the framework of European Romantic studies (BARS, GER etc.).

The objectives of the symposium can be summarised as follows:

- a) *close readings* of both canonical and neglected texts of British Romanticism in order to identify various literary constructions of Italy and Italian cultural history; the viability of terms such as 'stereotype', 'cliché', were also discussed and subjected to criticism.
- b) addressing questions of implicit intertextuality and authorial interconnectedness and inquiring into the influence of Italy on the formation of British Romantic literature;
- c) re-negotiating Romantic canonicity in the context of diachronic and synchronic aesthetics and cultural evaluations;
- d) encouraging long-term national as well as international networking in the field of British Romanticism (predominantly between German and Italian universities);

- e) establishing a platform for scholarly exchange/cooperation for and among experts and young academics ('Nachwuchsförderung').

□ Entwicklung der durchgeführten Arbeiten einschließlich Abweichungen vom ursprünglichen Konzept, ggf. wissenschaftliche Fehlschläge, Probleme in der Projektorganisation oder technischen Durchführung.

The Villa Vigoni provided an excellent venue for concentrated scholarly debate, not least due to its highly modern conference room, technical equipment, its professional service staff and collaboration before and during the symposium. As the texts and paintings discussed also featured Romantic constructions of Lake Como and the Alps, the conference venue was ideal and gave a special vivacity to the discussions. Scientific failures were excluded because all participants were ready to accept the experimental character of the workshop and had consented to dispense with longish talks and papers. The additional fact that time slots were generous and meant to engender new ideas and new readings facilitated the dialogue between the scholars and helped to create a very dynamic and fruitful atmosphere.

Darstellung der erreichten Ergebnisse und Diskussion im Hinblick auf den relevanten Forschungsstand, mögliche Anwendungsperspektiven und denkbare Folgeuntersuchungen.

Following the initiative of Prof. Dr. Norbert Lennartz (University of Vechta) and Prof. Dr. Lilla Maria Crisafulli (University of Bologna), experts from Italy and Germany made use of the "Close Reading" format of the DFG and the German-Italian Centre for European Excellence at Villa Vigoni. Conceptualised as a workshop, as a platform for different interpretations and discussions, the symposium was explicitly meant to have the character of an experiment. Instead of the usual practice of giving talks followed by question-and-answer-sessions of about 10 minutes, the time slots of this symposium (2-3 hours) allowed for more in-depth analyses of the texts in question – a format which was generally appreciated by the participants. After a short introduction into the context and background of the texts by the chair, selected passages were carefully read together and opened to

controversial and fruitful discussion. This uncommon approach to texts invited participants to give feedback to readings and work in progress (of books, articles, theses) which were suggested by the chair. The close readings of poems and extracts from novels and travel-ogues thus not only shed light on the known and unknown ramifications of British Romanticism but also on the problems that German and Italian critics were facing while writing or drafting a book. That this workshop proved to be anything but "filthy," as Dr Frankenstein characterises his laboratory in the eponymous novel *Frankenstein* (1818) by Mary Shelley, is self-evident.

The symposium was opened by the two coordinators, Prof. Dr. Lilla Maria Crisafulli and Prof. Dr. Norbert Lennartz, who initiated the discussion on "(Mis-) Constructions and Distortions of Italy in Texts and Images". Both speakers pointed out that mis-constructions of Italy, depictions of Italy as the 'other,' have a long tradition and can be found as early as in the age of Shakespeare, where Italy was seen as the hotbed of Catholic fanaticism, superstition and depravity. A major shift of paradigm in the representation of Italy coincides with the Romantic period, when Italy becomes the longed-for destination of the Grand Tour travellers, the place of a spiritual rebirth (cf. Goethe). That Italy became the matrix for visions, yearnings and fantasies (and thus the ideal focus of positive and negative misconstructions) was foregrounded by the first session (led by Elena Spandri) on William Wordsworth's literary image of Italy, particularly in the late extracts from *Memorials of a Tour in Italy* (1837) and from *The Prelude* (1850) [Book Sixth]. The Wordsworth class was indissolubly linked with what Maria Vittoria Spissù expanded on in her evening lecture on Romantic painters and their images of Italy: Robert Cozens as well as William Turner adhered to a Romantic aesthetic ideal that, in a different context, Wordsworth described as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility." Painters and writers alike highlighted specific natural or monumental structures (an approach that seems to give a boost to the burgeoning 19th-century tourism and to the first tourist guides of the time [Baedeker etc.]), and produced spontaneous sketches that were later, after rational reflection on the "couch," blended into highly picturesque, but completely artificial compositions (in the original Latin sense of the word *con-ponere*). The results were subjective, unreal and idealist constructions of and views on Italy which replaced the various pejorative treatments and demonisations of Italy in the

works from Shakespeare to the travel accounts by Tobias Smollett, particularly the latter of which deployed warped images of Italy as a means of reinforcing Britishness.

The subjective perspective on Italy by Lady Morgan was the topic of another session by Ralf Haekel. The author's Irish background made her three-volume compendium *Italy* (1821) a suitable vehicle for her own republican and libertarian pursuits. Sessions on Felicia Hemans, Mary Shelley and her mother Mary Wollstonecraft by Diego Saglia and Carlotta Farese further helped to re-evaluate and to sharpen the female perspective on British Romanticism which, in the wake of Duncan Wu's anthologies, challenges the traditionally male-dominated canon. It became astoundingly clear that female writers used their image of Italy to voice their political commitment and to subject the political and social conventions of their time to severe criticism.

Two time slots were devoted to Lord Byron's *Italy-mirage* in Canto 4 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Whereas Gioia Angeletti mainly emphasised the latent political implications of the Italian stanzas, particularly those of Venice, Norbert Lennartz delineated the eroticisation of Italy as a female and porous body. A close reading of these stanzas revealed that Venice was frequently associated with fertility (Cybele), but also with (political and economic) prostitution subtly hinted at by Danaë myth. In blatant contrast to the eroticisation of Venice (a liminal city at that time under Austrian dominion), Rome was conceived of as a city of ruin, devastation and grief. The mythological model for this is Niobe who is – and this is a novelty in representations of Niobe – even deprived of her tears and shown as being completely dry and emotionally dehydrated.

Chairing the session on P.B. Shelley, the symposium's co-coordinator Lilla Crisafulli shed an intriguing light on the role of Italian art, and, in particular, on the ballet for an understanding of Shelley's much discussed and hermetic verse drama *Prometheus Unbound*. To what extent a synaesthetic combination of music, poetry and dance is at the core of the play has been hitherto neglected in critical studies. The format of 'close reading' canonical and non-canonical texts provided a good opportunity to go deeply into the structures of the text and to highlight the existence of otherwise forgotten sister arts.

The fourth and last day of the seminar focused on the representation of Italy as it appears in the works of William Beckford, Samuel Rogers and Mary Shelley. Michael Meyer mainly concentrated on Beckford's *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents*, which provided further examples of how the Romantics re-adapted the symbolic crossing of the

Alps, which became a stereotypical feature of the Grand Tour fashion. In terms of composition, Beckford's text (nowadays eclipsed by the attention given to *Vathek*) marks an unusual example of subverting literary conventions by caricaturing forms like the travelogue, the Gothic tradition and also, to a certain degree, anticipating the modernist stream-of-consciousness-technique. In the session dedicated to Samuel Rogers, Roberto Baronti Marchiò pointed out the long-forgotten importance of Rogers as a writer and a public figure in the Romantic period. While Byron was not reluctant to praise Rogers's poem *The Pleasures of Memory* (1792) and to acknowledge the older poet's relevance for his generation, Roger is nowadays scarcely read. A closer look at the poem *Italy* (1822-28) – which seems to be indebted both to Byron and to Wordsworth – however shows that Roger's poem is eminently derivative and, by the end of the Romantic period, provides no new facets to the Romantic image of Italy.

Although there was unanimous agreement that the symposium was designed as a workshop, that the re-readings of the texts had an experimental and tentative character and that there will be no conference proceedings in the traditional sense, there will be follow-up activities to keep the dynamic debate going: material studied and discussed during the symposium will be published on the website of the Inter-University Centre for the Study of Romanticism (University of Bologna), including the programme, the call for papers and some photos of the event. As mentioned before, results and discussions will also feed into the international conference on marginalised and lost Romantics which (augmented by speakers from the US, Britain, Canada) will be held in Vechta in May 2017. This in turn is meant to be a kick-off conference for a larger DFG-proposal which is aimed at giving the idea of re-mapping Romanticism a new impetus. The Villa Vigoni seminar thus helped to establish an important network for present and future international cooperation between experts from Germany and Italy in the field of British Romanticism. While conferences on British Romanticism are commonly organised in connection with Anglo-American academic partners, the Villa Vigoni symposium proved to be an excellent and uncommon opportunity for reinforcing the academic dialogue between German and Italian scholars and for offering a different and not exclusively Anglo-centric outlook on British Romantic studies.

3. Zusammenfassung (max. 1 DIN A4-Seite)

□ Allgemeinverständliche Darstellung der wichtigsten wissenschaftlichen Fortschritte und ggf. ihrer Anwendungsaspekte.

The symposium *Re-Discovering the 'Other': A Close Re-Reading of Literary Constructions of Italy in Canonical and Non-Canonical Texts of British Romanticism* contributed to a renegotiation of the literary canon of British Romanticism by a close reading of a selection of canonical and hitherto marginalised or even forgotten texts. A common topic which united canonical and non-canonical writers of that period was the infatuation and (more often than not) obsession with Italy – a highly seductive country which the writers travelled through or even chose to live in. What the workshop showed was that Italy was never a place inviting uniform responses and ideas. Considering the fact that poets came to Italy with different religious, political, and cultural expectations, they created a multi-focal concept of Italy culminating in the poetic creation of numerous 'Italies.' To what extent former misconstructions of Italy (predominantly by Shakespeare who allegedly never visited Italy and topographically misplaced Padua into Lombardy) were simply replaced by other misconstructions and proliferations of legends became patently obvious when texts were closely read, compared and juxtaposed. While writers from the early modern age to the 1750s endorsed a pejorative image of Italy and used this hotbed of Catholicism, Machiavellian and Aretine corruption as a touchstone for their ideas of (Protestant) Britishness, the Romantics fashioned themselves as cosmopolitans who saw Italy as the epitome of a vibrating energy which was not hemmed in by fundamentalist religion.

Taking into account the fact that even the term Romanticism is a (mis-)construction which never satisfactorily covers the different personalities and attitudes of the so-called Romantic poets, the participants could not help admitting that Italy was not only a multi-faceted phenomenon, but that in Romantic texts and paintings it almost vanishes and is dispelled by the conflicting visions, prejudices and myths of Italy, which during the lifetime of the British Romantics was anything but a homogenous country waiting for its unity in the decades to come.