Contingent Romanticism

(Winter Werner’s abstract and bio are included in her article)

Volume Abstract

“Romantic Contingency” was conceived of with two questions in mind: how can Romanticism help us understand contingency (temporal, historical, formal), and how does contingency affect Romanticism as a field of inquiry? Essays in the volume attend to both contingency’s potential for imagining and enacting other ways of being, as well as its register of the tenuous and provisional. With topics ranging from skylarks to virtuality, the essays in this volume demonstrate how Romanticism and its relationship to modernity provides a crucial vantage point from which to examine modernity’s defining condition.

Editor Bio

Padma Rangarajan as Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside. She is the author of *Imperial Babel: Translation, Exoticism, and the Long Nineteenth Century* (Fordham, 2014). Her research interests include colonial epistemologies, literature and religion, political violence, and imperial ecologies.

Washington Bio

Chris Washington is Associate Professor of English at Francis Marion University. His

first monograph, *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-Apocalyptic Hope and Life in the Anthropocene*, was published by the University of Toronto Press in September 2019. His Norton Critical Edition of Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* is forthcoming in August 2022. With Anne McCarthy he is co-editor of the collection *Romanticism and Speculative Realism* (Bloomsbury, 2019). His essays have appeared in *The Keats Shelley Journal*, *Romantic Circles Praxis*, *Essays in Romanticism*, *European Romantic Review*, *Romantic Circles Pedagogy Commons*, and *Literature Compass*. He is currently completing two books: *Non-Binary/ Jane Austen* and *Necro-Liberalism.*

Washington Abstract

This essay reflects, via sorities, on what it means to write Romanticism during a pandemic in relation to the alienation and loneliness that lastness is in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* and *Mathilda* and the recuperative power of ghostly love in her “On Ghosts.” Romanticism is always writing at and about the end of the world. Shelley wants, in time…changes over time at the end of the world.

TeBokkel Bio

Nathan TeBokkel teaches literature at the University of British Columbia, beekeeps, and works on a melon farm. He recently finished his PhD, and his research grows from his interests in history, agriculture, romantic poetry, and science and technology studies.

TeBokkel Abstract

This essay explores the quintessential romantic figure of the skylark and disambiguates the overdetermined concept of contingency to reimagine a paradigmatic literary-humanist thought style and to articulate new lines of inquiry about romantic poetics, romanticist theory and criticism, and academic attitudes about disciplinarity and methodology. Gathering writers from Percy Shelley and Robert Bloomfield to Margaret Masterman and W. V. O. Quine, this essay explicates the systrophic and elliptical figures of idea and matter, fact and fiction, and history and nature at the heart of this paradigmatic thought style, and argues for these figures’ critical, historical, and contingent (in all its polysemy) repurposing toward an intellectual commons rather than enclosed fields.

Speitz Abstract

Michele Speitz, “Infrastructure and Environment as Archive: On Haitian Revolutionary Romanticism and Voicing Contingent Desolations”

This essay studies national narratives at the heart of one of the best-known works of Haitian revolutionary Romanticism. At issue is how these national narratives participate within larger semiotic systems of national infrastructure and nationalized earth. More particularly, the essay foregrounds Haitian places and ruins that bear complicated realities and histories in need of telling. In signature Romantic style, Haitian grounds and built structures have their own stories to tell and speak volumes in Charles Hérard Dumesle’s *Voyage dans le nord d'Hayti* (1824). But the voices they sound and the accounts they record are not homogenous, timeless, nor transcendent, as we find in more universalizing iterations of Romantic-era calls for new political orders. Instead these voices and histories are particular, personal, and contingent—proving especially provocative when read in light of key terminology from Haiti’s *Acte de l’Indépendance* (1804). Dumesle’s revolutionary Romantic poetics turn upon the politics of prosopopoeia, intoning counternarratives and correctives to nationally-chauvinistic French colonial politics and aesthetics in part by giving voice to Haitian locales, by giving rise to the human and nonhuman stories they might tell if these places too had tongues or pens. That is, Dumesle drives home the political edge of the aesthetics and poetics of prosopopoeia, a trope that uses the imaginative and metaphorical spaces of narrative to imbue voice to whatever typically is not able to speak, from other animals to the land itself, from built objects to dead subjects. In this sense, Dumesle activates an especially time-sensitive iteration of prosopopoeia in place of more lyric-driven instances of prosopopoeia that might be said to reach for timeless universality. Here Haiti’s natural and built environments speak tales of national heroics and chronicle compressed events of human dispossession and death that cannot be sundered from stories of long-term environmental degradation and desolation.

Speitz Bio

Michele Speitz is the founding Director of the Furman Humanities Center and Associate Professor of Romantic literature and culture at Furman University. Speitz's primary research and teaching areas include poetics, aesthetic theory, literary theory, ecocriticism, and sound studies.