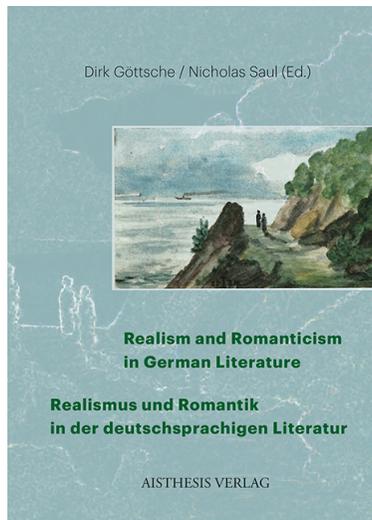


Leseprobe

Realism and Romanticism  
in German Literature

Realismus und Romantik  
in der deutschsprachigen Literatur

Edited by  
Dirk Göttsche and Nicholas Saul



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## Introduction

When writers and critics such as Gustav Freytag, Julian Schmidt, Berthold Auerbach and Friedrich Theodor Vischer established a new literary movement under the name of 'Realism' in response to the 1848 revolution and its defeat, the term 'Romanticism', including the perceived 'Romanticism' of *Vormärz* aesthetics, acted as a critical foil for the new departure. Thus for example when Hermann Hettner, under whose aegis no less a figure than Gottfried Keller studied, attempted to outline the future of German literature in 1850, a key part of his aesthetico-political strategy involved the polemical denunciation of German Romanticism's perceived idealist escapism. It was all "elfenluftige Märchendichtung" and "schwächlich verschwimmende Innerlichkeit".<sup>1</sup> To an extent Goethe and Schiller were excepted from this critique. Yes, they were idealists. But they at least opposed "romantische Phantastik"<sup>2</sup> and appealed to the unchallengeable authority of classical antiquity. This, however, was a mere transient concession. For the new "realistische Kunst"<sup>3</sup> opposes even the classical duo. Their admirable, yet superannuated achievement will be eclipsed by the new literature's striving for "innere Wahrheit"<sup>4</sup>, rooted as it is in something there has never been: the imminent emergence of a new, free nation and literature's concomitant, judiciously idealised rendering of its vital reality of action and work. In the same year, in pursuit of a variant of this same goal – *Volksthümlichkeit* – Julian Schmidt for his part dismissed the entire preceding epoch of Romanticism in cunningly Hegelian terms as "das Zeitalter des *subjectiven Idealismus*".<sup>5</sup> That entire literature was artificial and elitist. Capricious writers struck the pose

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1 See Hermann Hettner. *Die romantische Schule in ihrem inneren Zusammenhange mit Göthe und Schiller*. Braunschweig 1850, cited in *Realismus und Gründerzeit. Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848-1880*. Mit einer Einführung in den Problemkreis und einer Quellenbibliographie. Eds. Max Bucher, Werner Hahl, Georg Jäger and Reinhard Wittmann. 2 vols. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1981, vol. 2: *Manifeste und Dokumente*, pp. 63-66 (p. 65).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 See Julian Schmidt. "Die Reaction in der deutschen Poesie". *Die Grenzboten* 10/1 (1851), pp. 17-25, cited in *Realismus und Gründerzeit* (note 1), pp. 83-87 (p. 83).

of sovereign irony, mocked the natural and authentic for the jaded palates of their select readership, haunted houses like sentimental vampires in search of ever more exquisitely refined emotions, and, when in search of simple devotional awe either wallowed “in der trüben Mystik verworrener Bilder” and “Sehnsucht” or dissolved earthly reality into the “falsche Unendlichkeit” of some abstract future paradise.<sup>6</sup>

In 1850s and 1860s criticism this antithetical conception of ‘Realism’ and ‘Romanticism’ was part of a politics of literature that, despite its often anti-idealist rhetoric, combined an idealist conception of literary realism with political liberalism and bourgeois self-assertion in the face of the combined threats of reactionary politics, mass culture and the socio-cultural upheaval of accelerating modernisation and industrialisation. This historical origin of received literary terminology has survived in the orthodox notion that Realism and Romanticism mark not just two distinct periods in literary history, but are also radically opposed in their understanding of literature and in their literary practice. While there are good reasons for such mapping of nineteenth-century German literature, there are today also significant complications which encourage caution against easy oppositions of Realism and Romanticism.

There is, for example, from the perspective of ‘Romanticism’ itself the begged question of the movement’s own epochal identity. Well-founded revisionist scholarship established long since on foot of a dialectical concept of cultural evolution an inner identity of Enlightenment and Early Romanticism. This is legible in significant traces of the Enlightenment project in Early Romantic thought, and that common foundation (subjectivity, autonomy, intellectualism, religious secularisation, utopianism, constructivism) has since been extended to comprehend both the Enlightenment project of Adorno and Habermas and the notion of Romanticism as belonging to a macro-epoch of modernity – including Realism – extending from 1750 to the 1950s.<sup>7</sup> This trend has been reflected at the other margin of the *Kunst-*

6 Ibid., pp. 84–85.

7 See Helmut Schanze. *Romantik und Aufklärung. Untersuchungen zu Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis*. Nuremberg: Carl, 1976 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1966); Andrew Bowie. *From Romanticism to Critical Theory. The Philosophy of German Literary Theory*. London, New York: Routledge, 1997; Silvio Vietta. *Die literarische Moderne. Eine problemgeschichtliche Darstellung der deutschsprachigen Literatur von Hölderlin bis Thomas Bernhard*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1992. See as case study on this Nicholas Saul. “Experimentelle Selbsterfahrung und Selbstdestruktion. Anatomie des Ichs in der literarischen Moderne”. *Ästhetische Moderne in Europa*.

*periode*, where scholarship has established a further blurring of borders, the inner continuity of late-Romantic theory and practice with the incipient scientism, populism and *Völksthumlichkeit* of *Biedermeier* and *Vormärz* literature.<sup>8</sup> Recent recognition of internal tensions within the ‘Romantic School’, such as Arnim’s and Brentano’s horror of Novalis’s encyclopaedic intellectualism, E.T.A. Hoffmann’s withering literary deconstructions of Novalis’s central myths, or Heine’s savage polemic against the Schlegels, echoes and confirms these widely-focused discussions, and suggests from today’s standpoint that the talk of ‘Romanticism’ as a self-contained epoch defined by an internally consistent singular body of thought and cultural strategy is itself strategically constructed and at least questionable. This is surely supported by a more discerning gaze at Realist theory and practice itself. There, for example, is the continued fascination of Realist writers like Stifter, Storm and Fontane by the uncanny and the supernatural, and the legacy of Romantic motifs, characters, themes, narrative devices – and even arguments – in Realist narrative. There are furthermore the legacies of idealist aesthetics in theories of the ‘bürgerlich’ (or programmatic) and ‘poetic’ strands of German Realism during the mid-nineteenth century. There are intertextual references and continuities in genre histories, and post-Romantic counterstrands even after the Realist agenda became fully established by the 1860s – to name but a few of the challenges to the traditional understanding. Thus the mediation of ‘Romanticism’ with Realism needs to be reassessed, both in received epochal terms and in terms of the larger narrative and genealogies of historical scholarship.

This volume aims on that account to reassess German Realism’s relationship with Romanticism and to explore the multiple ways in which writers from Stifter and Keller to Raabe and Fontane engage with literary and cultural aspects of German Romanticism, with Romantic theory and philosophy, and with individual Romantic authors and critics. Considering Realist

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*Grundzüge und Problemzusammenhänge seit der Romantik*. Eds. Silvio Vietta and Dirk Kemper. Munich: Fink 1998, pp. 321-342.

8 See for example Wolfgang Frühwald. *Das Spätwerk Clemens Brentanos (1815-1842). Romantik im Zeitalter der Metternich’schen Restauration*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1977. Frühwald of course builds on Sengle (see note 10); Wolfgang Bunzel, Peter Stein, Florian Vaßen (eds.). *Romantik und Vormärz. Zur Archäologie literarischer Kommunikation in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003 (= Forum Vormärz Forschung, Vormärz-Studien, X).

writing from the 1840s to around 1900, it combines theoretical approaches to rethinking the relationship between Realism and Romanticism with a range of case studies and comparative investigations. Building on the new phase of research into German Realism which scholars such as Marianne Wünsch, Claus-Michael Ort, Hugo Aust, Michael Titzmann and Gerhard Plumpe initiated during the 1990s<sup>9</sup>, the volume aims to promote a further remapping of German Realism in its broader context and beyond the reductive patterns of orthodox literary historiography, which are still rooted in the literary politics of the period. While considering a range of literary and non-literary sources, discourses and perspectives, the chapters of this volume interlink in multiple ways and they all address a number of fundamental questions which complicate or undercut the received antithesis between Romanticism and Realism, re-evaluating their relationship in broader nineteenth-century literary and cultural history.

A first approach to remapping the relationship between Realism and Romanticism in nineteenth-century German literature, as reflected in the chapters of this volume, is historical differentiation, including closer analysis of transitions and overlaps between both periods and a new appreciation of the multiple interaction between writing perceived as Realist and Romantic. The rise of programmatic Realism during the 1850s arguably builds on more than three decades of what Friedrich Sengle called “biedermeierliche[r] Detailrealismus” and (with reference to Charles Sealsfield) “Frührealismus”<sup>10</sup>: the development of realist techniques of writing and a poetics of

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9 See Marianne Wünsch. *Realismus (1850-1890). Zugänge zu einer literarischen Epoche*. Mit Beiträgen von Jan-Oliver Decker, Peter Klimczak, Hans Krahl und Martin Nies. Kiel: Ludwig, 2007; Claus-Michael Ort. *Zeichen und Zeit. Probleme des literarischen Realismus*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998; Hugo Aust. *Literatur des Realismus*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Weimar: Stuttgart, 2000; Michael Titzmann. “‘Grenzziehung’ vs. ‘Grenztülgung’. Zu einer fundamentalen Differenz der Literatursysteme ‘Realismus’ und ‘Frühe Moderne’”. Titzmann. *Realismus und frühe Moderne. Beispielinterpretationen und Systematisierungsversuche*. Munich: Belleville, 2009, pp. 275-307; *Bürgerlicher Realismus und Gründerzeit 1848-1890*. Eds. Edward McInnes and Gerhard Plumpe. Munich: dtv, 1996 (= Hanser Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart, 6).

10 Friedrich Sengle. *Biedermeierzeit. Deutsche Literatur im Spannungsfeld zwischen Restauration und Revolution 1815-1848*. 3 vols. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1971-1980, vol. 1, p. 287 and passim; vol. 3, p. 809.

critical engagement with emerging modernity, which has its origins in the transition from the Late Enlightenment around 1800 to the *Biedermeier* style of the early Restoration period (see for example the late works of Therese Huber, the Swiss writers Ulrich Hegner and Heinrich Zschokke, the *Zeitromane* of the anti-Napoleonic ‘Liberation Wars’, and popular fiction of the 1820s)<sup>11</sup> and which later helps to prepare the ground for post-1848 Realism in the socio-politically engaged *Vormärz* poetics of the 1830s and 1840s. Despite the persistence of Romantic tropes, the social novel of the 1840s, for example, is arguably more ‘realistic’ than the poetic Realism of the *Nachmärz* period with its turn against such perceived ‘naturalism’ and its revalidation and bourgeois adaptation of idealist aesthetics. While the early Realism of the Restoration period largely develops alongside and in opposition to Romanticism, there is ample evidence of interaction and border crossing, as exemplified by the novellas of the late Tieck, Wilhelm Hauff or Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, by Willibald Alexis’s novels or indeed Ernst Willkomm and post-1838 Heinrich Laube<sup>12</sup>, to name but a few, all of whose works illustrate the role of Romantic motifs and techniques in the emergence of Realist modes of writing. The violent rejection of *Vormärz* ‘Romanticism’ by the proponents of *Nachmärz* Realism epitomizes a very typically modern politics of theory which claims innovation by quite deliberately exorcising and ‘forgetting’ the ghosts of the new movement’s history. Such exclusion inevitable sets the scene for uncanny returns that, over time, undermine and transform the new paradigm itself.

The politicised use of the term ‘Romanticism’ in the theory and criticism of Realism from the 1850s and 1860s also highlights the need to indicate very clearly what is being referred to when terms such as ‘Romanticism’ and

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11 See Dirk Göttsche. *Zeit im Roman. Literarische Zeitreflexion und die Geschichte des Zeitromans im späten 18. und im 19. Jahrhundert*. Munich: Fink, 2001, pp. 433-494; “Der Zeitroman zwischen 1815 und 1830. Ein vergessenes Kapitel aus der Geschichte des deutschen Romans”. *Immermann-Jahrbuch* 2 (2001), pp. 99-135.

12 See Dirk Göttsche. “Gutzkow und Laube. Poetologische Aspekte einer Zeitgenossenschaft zwischen Vormärz und Realismus”. *Karl Gutzkow and His Contemporaries / Karl Gutzkow und seine Zeitgenossen. Beiträge zur Internationalen Konferenz des Editionsprojektes Karl Gutzkow vom 7. bis 9. September 2010 in Exeter*. Ed. Gert Vonhoff in collaboration with Beke Sinjen and Sabrina Stolfa. Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011 (= Forum Vormärz Forschung, Vormärz-Studien, XXI), pp. 79-106.

'Realism' are being used. Historical usage from the *Nachmärz* period, which established the orthodox dichotomy between both, is surely not identical with today's terminology in literary history in all respects. At the same time, established terminology for German literary history distinguishes quite happily and usefully between the Early Romanticism around 1800 and post-Napoleonic Late Romanticism, potentially even considering the need for an intermediate phase of *Hochromantik*<sup>13</sup>, while the period of Realism is largely conceived as a singular. This view of Realism has recently been enhanced by approaches drawing on Michel Foucault's discourse theory and Niklas Luhmann's *Systemtheorie* to define the "Literatursystem des Realismus" (in the singular)<sup>14</sup> and its unique "poetologische Koordinatensystem".<sup>15</sup> The persistence and consistency of the Realist paradigm throughout the second half of the nineteenth century is indeed striking and recent research since the 1990s has done much to enrich our understanding of what defines Realist poetics. That said – to argue for a moment against the grain –, the lack of such a "Koordinatensystem" for the description of the constitution of the 'Romantic' epoch can also be regarded differently: as both the symptom of the difficulties of classifying Romanticism *and* as a desideratum in scholarship of Romanticism. Taking Wünsch's model of how Early Modernism emerges from the system of Realism, it would, for example, be useful to attempt to establish such a model in order to describe – even heuristically – the relation of Romanticism and Realism in systems theory terms.

Concretely, Wünsch speculatively describes Realism as a system defined by three main co-ordinates, all semantically orientated around closure and limit: the self-consciousness of the stable subject, which precludes the serious treatment of unconscious energies and fluidities; the dominance of traditional social-ethical norms, which preclude the sympathetic treatment of deviance therefrom; and the unproblematised treatment of death as cognitive

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13 See for example Harro Segeberg, "Phasen der Romantik". *Romantik-Handbuch*. Ed. Helmut Schanze. Tübingen: Kröner, 1994, pp. 31-78; Wolfgang Bunzel (ed.). *Romantik. Epoche – Autoren – Werke*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010.

14 Wünsch. *Realismus* (note 9), p. 91 (heading) and chapter XII: "Vom späten 'Realismus' zur 'Frühen Moderne'. Modell eines literarischen Strukturwandels" (pp. 337-359).

15 Claus-Michael Ort. "Was ist Realismus?" *Realismus. Epoche – Autoren – Werke*. Ed. Christian Begemann. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007, pp. 11-26 (p. 20).

vanishing point. All these co-ordinates establish the closed character of a stable system which defines itself in Luhmannian terms against its environmental Other by this typical reduction of complexity. Yet these co-ordinates become destabilised in the historical contact zone between Realism and Early Modernism, that is, when Cartesian autonomy is breached by new theories of the self, when received ethical norms are questioned, and when death becomes an epistemologically uncontrolled motor of narrative exploration. Thus a tipping-point of systematic instability is reached. The system based on closure cannot reproduce itself and a new evolution of the system is stabilised, which is orientated precisely around the openness of the subject characteristic of modernism. Now one could speculate that the semantic systems co-ordinates of German Romanticism might also – inter alia – be taken to include the fluidification of the rigid in general, and in particular the progressive opening of the subject to otherness, the overcoming of social-ethical norms, and the epistemological encounter with death, so that the recourse to Romanticism in the emergence of Early Modernism can be explained as catalysed by precisely a memory of the tendencies which Wünsch describes from an earlier epoch, and the emergence of neo-Romanticism in Early Modernism becomes comprehensible. But how, now thinking from the other end of the epoch, does the putative system of Romantic literature tip into Realism? Work heuristically to establish such a ‘system’ of Romanticism, which (as is well-known) defined itself over and above what has just been said as both system and *non*-system<sup>16</sup>, remains still to be done.

Moving beyond systems theory, there is nevertheless the further point that the abstractions of such high-level theoretical generalisation call in and of themselves for a move in the opposite direction: the need to describe historical differentiation in the light of the equally striking differences between the many authors labelled as Realists, and the powerful shifts, even within their own *œuvres*, from the 1850s to the 1890s and beyond. Analysing Realism’s engagement with Romanticism can thus act as a catalyst for the kind of micro-stranding and micro-periodisation that need to complement new insight into the “system of Realism” in order to do justice to the richness of the literature archived under that label and the dynamic of cultural

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16 See *Novalis. Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Eds. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Heinz Ritter, Hans-Joachim Mähl, Gerhard Schulz. 6 vols. Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1960ff., vol. 2, pp. 288-289 (Nr. 648).

developments reflected in Realist writing. Pursuing a range of motifs, discourses and techniques from the 1840s through the pioneering phase of programmatic Realism to Late Realism and the often neglected post-1890s late Wilhelmine Realism, the chapters of this volume also work towards such historical differentiation. They draw attention to subtle shifts in the shape and function of references to Romanticism in Realist writing that has moved beyond the literary politics of the *Nachmärz* period, operating in a cultural context in which Romanticism, perceived as truly historical by the end of the 1870s, offers new opportunities rather than posing a threat.

Redressing the balance between reconstructing the poetological system of Realism and historical differentiation, however, also leads to a second and potentially more revolutionary approach to remapping the relationship of Realism with Romanticism: reassessing and indeed acknowledging the systematic place of (references to and engagement with) Romanticism in Realist poetics and Realist writing. As Christian Begemann, in particular, points out in his chapter (see below), the idealist legacy in the theory and practice of German Realism, i.e. the insistence that the realism envisaged should portray the ‘true reality’ of the bourgeois world and of human reality more broadly, rather than offering a merely ‘naturalist’ depiction, opens the back door to what the combined politics of bourgeois liberalism and programmatic Realism sought to exclude: the Romantic legacy in philosophy and literature, representing the very idealism that poetic Realism relies on to counteract the “zur *Prosa* geordnete Wirklichkeit” (Hegel) of modernity with literature’s “grüne Stellen” (Vischer) and to produce the ‘erhöhte Kunstwelt’ (Ludwig) of aesthetically induced order in the representation of the real world.<sup>17</sup> The internal contradictions of Realist theory effectively place (references to) Romanticism at the very heart of Realist poetics, and this paradoxical poetological framework is reflected in the return of Romantic themes and motifs, as well as more ambitious engagement with Romantic epistemology and poetics, in the literary practice of both major and minor authors of Realism throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. The references to

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17 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Werke*, vol. 15: *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*. Eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1986, p. 392; Friedrich Theodor Vischer. *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaften vom Schönen* (1857), cited in *Realismus und Gründerzeit* (note 1), vol. 2, pp. 216-222 (p. 216); Otto Ludwig. *Shakespeare-Studien* (1874), cited *ibid.*, pp. 101-104 (p. 103).

Romanticism thus play a key role in the defining self-reflexivity of Realist narrative from Stifter and Keller to Raabe, Storm and Fontane; they are a catalyst of the often misunderstood modernism of Realist writing, whose epistemology and literary refinement extend well beyond the often rather crude politics of Realist theory. It is a well-known fact that Realist theory and the practice of Realist writing are two rather separate discourses and that novelists of Realism, such as Keller, Storm and Raabe, deliberately resisted theorizing their work<sup>18</sup>; Friedrich Spielhagen is perhaps the most obvious example of a writer who disregarded his theory of objectivist representation in his own novel-writing<sup>19</sup>, and the implicit poetics of Keller's, Storm's, Raabe's and Fontane's narratives, as demonstrated in the chapters of this volume, are far more advanced than the theoretical discourse produced at the time of their early works. If "das imaginative Durchspielen und Variieren von Wirklichkeitskonstruktionen, die die Gesellschaft ernsthaft beschäftigen, d.h. die Simulation von Alternativen gerade da, wo üblicherweise Unausweichlichkeit vermutet wird"<sup>20</sup>, is a defining feature of the writing of German Realism, then its references to Romanticism play a crucial role in this achievement.

Moving beyond literary historical periodisation, such analysis of the systematic place of Romanticism in Realism leads to a more general reconsideration of the relationship between both periods. To begin with, Romanticism and Realism are both embedded in longer-term cultural developments in the process of modernity and modernisation which transcend literary periodisation, while writers and critics from both periods respond to and engage with them. The example considered in this volume is the history of medical knowledge and its link to Romantic anthropology, to the Romantic philosophy of nature, and the rise of the modern sciences during the nineteenth century. References to Romantic anthropology play a crucial role in Realist writers' response to the rise of modern scientific knowledge, and the response may well be a contrapuntal revalidation of Romantic epistemology, just as German Realist literature's response to other aspects of the radical

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18 See Gerhard Plumpe. "Einleitung". *Bürgerlicher Realismus und Gründerzeit* (note 9), pp. 17-83 (p. 42).

19 See Jeffrey L. Sammons. *Friedrich Spielhagen. Novelist of Germany's False Dawn*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2004, pp. 52-69.

20 Edward McInnes and Gerhard Plumpe. "Vorbemerkung". *Bürgerlicher Realismus und Gründerzeit* (note 9), pp. 7-15 (p. 7).

“Verwandlung der Welt” (Osterhammel)<sup>21</sup> in the process of nineteenth-century modernisation and globalisation is sometimes contrapuntal.<sup>22</sup> In retrospect, and considering the reception history of Realism during the twentieth century, ‘Romanticism’ and ‘Realism’ also act as ciphers for different literary styles as well as different epistemologies that have since acted as points of reference for literary developments as well as debate in critical theory and aesthetics. Here too a bewildering counterpoint is in evidence. The vast majority of novels published in Germany (and elsewhere) today are ‘realist’ novels implicitly appealing to nineteenth-century aesthetic and ethical values, so that ‘difficult’ works which transcend that framework to address the modern condition in innovative ways – such as Botho Strauß’s *Der junge Mann* (1984) – often contain internal self-legitimations directed at their modern readers in the shape of self-consciously foregrounded appeals to the ‘Romantic’ tradition. Conversely, as Russell Berman’s essay suggests, aesthetic Realism such as that of Theodor Storm may *also* embody a transhistorical ethic which offers solutions to the modern condition precisely through its anti-modernism.

*Realism and Romanticism in German Literature* begins with the first approach to remapping Realism, the reassessment of the fuzzy historical relationship between Romanticism and Realism, of transitions between the two periods, of critical and literary responses to Romanticism in the emergence of programmatic Realism, and of the transformation of elements of Romantic discourse and style in Realist writing (“From Romanticism to Realism: Negations, Transitions, Transformations”). The rise of bourgeois and poetic Realism since the 1840s arguably builds on the development of realist modes of representation, in particular in narrative, which emerged in the transition from Late Enlightenment to Biedermeier style in novels and novellas written after the end of the Napoleonic period, alongside Germany’s Late Romanticism, in the context of “biedermeierlicher Detailrealismus” (Sengle). Ludwig Tieck’s influential “Dialognovellen”, Caroline de la Motte Fouqué’s later novels, some of Wilhelm Hauff’s novellas, Willibald Alexis’s work, and

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21 Jürgen Osterhammel. *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. Munich: Beck, 2009.

22 See *Metropole, Provinz und Welt. Raum und Mobilität in der Literatur des Realismus*. Eds. Roland Berbig and Dirk Göttsche. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013 (= Schriften der Theodor Fontane-Gesellschaft, 9).