

Call for Papers

2025 Conference of the **German Society for English Romanticism (GER)**

Negotiations of Value in the Romantic Age

25-28 September 2025

Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg (Campus Erlangen)

Keynote Speakers:

David Duff (London), **Michelle Faubert** (Manitoba), **Joanna Rostek** (Gießen / Leipzig)

Several scholars have proposed that the turn of the 19th century saw a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of the concept of value. In *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2008), for instance, Mary Poovey argued that, during the 17th and well into the 18th century, aesthetic and economic conceptions of value were not yet seen as inherently opposed to each other. On the contrary, one of the functions particularly of what she refers to as ‘imaginative writing’ had been to convey the meaning(s) and mechanisms of the credit economy as it had gradually developed and gained in importance during the early modern age. With the economic discourse becoming more and more dominant in the growing consumer societies of the Western world, however, economic value began to be singled out. At the same time, those invested in the aesthetic and ethico-philosophical domains also aimed at distinguishing their respective disciplinary positions, including distinctive notions of what counted as valuable, as being of worth. According to James Thompson, from the 18th century, “the concept of value underwent profound transformation and was rearranged into the various humanistic, financial, and aesthetic discourses that we know today” (1). Accordingly, it is only at the beginning of the 19th century that the philosophical subdiscipline of axiology – the theory of value and valuation – began to take shape (cf. e.g. Krobath). At the same time, writers such as William Wordsworth developed a specific ‘Romantic ideology’ (McGann) of their own with which they sought to offer an alternative value system: literature was conceptualised as having a value that could not be measured by the logic of economic exchange. While these writers, especially in their poetological works, took pains to characterise Poetry – capital-lettered ‘Poetry’ was understood to include not only poetry in the narrow sense and imaginative literature as such, but also painting, sculpture, architecture and so forth – as elevated above materialistic concerns, they did not situate it beyond them in an absolute way either. After all, as P.B. Shelley famously declared, poets, as “the unacknowledged legislators of the world”, must aim at “true utility”. Poetry was meant to have its very own use value.

In *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto* (2018), Brian Massumi claims that “[t]he dominant notion of value in our epoch is economic” (5). If he is right and if it is also correct that the turn of the nineteenth century saw the irretrievable splitting apart of previously cohering conceptions of value, an understanding of the processes that led to and constituted this epistemic shift will indeed be crucial for locating ourselves in the present. Accordingly, the conference is inspired by a relatively

recent approach in literary and cultural studies which, amongst other labels, has been named ‘economic criticism’¹ and whose basic tenets and lines of investigation Ellen Grünkemeier, Nora Pleßke and Joanna Rostek suggest to be the following:

Economic criticism (i) analyses how the economy and what is seen as its constitutive elements (e.g. money, consumption, economic agents) are represented in literature, film, visual arts, etc.; (ii) studies non-fiction about the economy (e.g. the foundational texts of classical political economy or Marxism) as primary literature; (iii) scrutinises activities and phenomena associated with the economy (e.g. shopping, work, class) through the methodologies of cultural and literary studies; (iv) investigates how economic frameworks influence the creation of literary and cultural products as well as the production of knowledge in academic disciplines; (v) explores points of convergence between terms, concepts, and methods of economics, literary, and cultural studies (e.g. circulation, representation, value, utility). (117)

However, precisely because the Romantic conjuncture is complex, it will not be enough to solely consider the literary and cultural as well as other domains through the lens of ‘the economy’ (which economic criticism does not intend anyway). Instead, the conference encourages a discussion about various discursive perspectives on value in the Romantic Age by way of different theoretical and methodological approaches.

We invite you to submit proposals for 20-minute papers that shed light on all aspects that touch on the notion of value and help to explain its dissemination during the Romantic Age.

Papers may address but are of course not limited to aspects regarding

- the value of literature
- negotiations of value in literary texts
- the meaning and centrality of value in the economic discourse
- the value(s) ascribed to the economy
- political and politicised notions of value
- philosophical, ethical, and/or religious conceptualisations of value
- value(s) assigned to and associated with human beings, animals, plants, minerals, ‘Nature’
- the value(s) of gender, race/ethnicity, class, age, (dis-)ability etc.
- the value(s) of aesthetic, political, social etc. form (literary forms, but also forms of behaviour, architectural form, etc.)
- the form of value
- representational and/versus affective conceptualisations of value.

Please send proposals of 300-500 words and a short biographical note to one of the local organisers by 15 January 2025: Gerold Sedlmayr (gerold.sedlmayr@fau.de), Kathrin Bethke (kathrin.bethke@fau.de) or Mona Kammer (mona.kammer@fau.de).

Link to GER website: <https://www.englische-romantik.de/>

Works Cited:

Grünkemeier, Ellen, Nora Pleßke, and Joanna Rostek. “The Value of Economic Criticism Reconsidered: Approaching Literature and Culture through the Lens of Economics”. *Introduction. Proceedings*

¹ Cf. <https://www.economic-criticism.de/>.

- Anglistentag 2017*. Ed. Anne-Julia Zwierlein, Jochen Petzold, Katharina Boehm, and Martin Decker. Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier (WVT), 2018, pp. 117-125.
- Krobath, Hermann T. (2009). *Werte: Ein Streifzug durch die Philosophie*. Königshausen & Neumann.
- Massumi, Brian. *99 Theses on the Revaluation of Value: A Postcapitalist Manifesto*. U of Minnesota P, 2018.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. U of Chicago P., 1983.
- Poovey, Mary. *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain*. U of Chicago P, 2008.
- Thompson, James. *Models of Value: Eighteenth-Century Political Economy and the Novel*. 1996.