Ralf Haekel
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A Romantics Chronology, 1780–1832
(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)
by Martin Garrett

IN THE TIME OF THE INTERNET AND GOOGLE, a chronology is an odd genre.[1] As opposed to the pre-digital era, scholars and students of romanticism today are used to having access to dates, events, and facts with the help of a mouse click, which also means that reading a chronology of the years between 1780 and 1832 is both an unaccustomed as well as a rewarding experience. Martin Garrett's *A Romantics Chronology, 1780–1832* focuses on key events of the romantic period. Garrett's work is extraordinary in the sense that it is published as part of a book series concentrating on the chronology of individual authors. Rather than highlighting one given figure in British literature of the period such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge or Jane Austen, the book encompasses a whole range of writers, as it "focuses in particular detail on the life and works of Austen, Blake, Burns, Byron, Coleridge, Hazlitt, Hemans, Keats, Charles and Mary Lamb, Landon, Scott, Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley, Turner, Wollstonecraft and William and Dorothy Wordsworth" (vi). As this array of literary figures indicates, Garrett's chronology provides not a linear narrative like a biography would, but rather, as the author argues in the preface, reveals "juxtapositions, connections, [and] possible links" (vi). Whilst an online search engine would merely provide the date of a given event, this chronology provides context, development, and unsuspected correlations.

The strength of this chronology is, therefore, that it displays the romantic period as a network of coincidences as well as contradictions, thus confirming Reinhard Koselleck's interpretation of the period as characterised by the "contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*)."[2] This is only possible because Garrett's chronology is immensely well researched, very detailed, and rich in information. Not merely providing material concerning the British literary figures, the data is placed against a wider European and American historical, cultural, and political background. For instance, the entry on the first performance of Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber* in Mannheim in 1782 is supplemented by information on the first English translation of 1798 and the first London performance in the proceeding year 1799. Gathering these facts is further facilitated by an index comprising some 80 pages—subdivided into three sections of author/name, title, and subject.

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[2] Reinhard Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 90.

Defining the dates of the beginning and the ending of the period is both a necessary and necessarily arbitrary but not wholly random activity, as Garrett maintains: "in the early 1780s writers including Crabbe, Wollstonecraft and Burns are active, and in 1832 Scott and Goethe die and the Reform Act passes into law" (vi). The entries within a single year provide insight into the wealth of literary, cultural, and political occurrences that are usually not taken into consideration. The year 1798 is a case in point. Not only is it particularly rich in events, it is also generally considered to be one of the defining moments in the history of romanticism. That year saw the composition of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*, the subsequent publication of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as the Wordsworths' and Coleridge's departure for Germany in September. It also witnessed the beginning and quick defeat of the Irish rebellion that would eventually lead to the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland in 1800. These events are complemented by information that enables readers to paint a fuller picture of the time. In 1798, "Byron succeeds his great-uncle, becoming 6th Baron Byron of Rochdale" (73), Haydn's *Schöpfung* is first performed in Vienna, and the Schlegel brothers first published the important German periodical *Athenaeum*. This, in turn, is accompanied by bits and pieces not generally considered to be basic knowledge, such as the fact that Wordsworth went to see Matthew Lewis's play *The Castle Spectre* in Bristol, or that Humphry Davy became assistant to Thomas Beddoes at the Pneumatic Institute.

The year 1798, thus, exemplifies the usefulness of this book. While a chronology has inherent limitations—it is highly selective, it necessarily presupposes a prior knowledge of both authors and works, and can thus only be used as a complementary work—because of its very organisation, it provides a different perspective on the period, complementing other scholarly genres such as histories, biographies, handbooks, and introductions. Martin Garrett's *A Romantics Chronology, 1780–1832* is a very well-researched and immensely resourceful book that provides quick insights into the romantic period. Its power to contextualise particular events turns it into an indispensable source for all students and scholars of romantic literature and culture.