THE ROMANTIC ERA

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I. General Studies

A major new yearbook takes pride of place this time: Athenäum. Jahrbuch für Romantik, ed. Ernst Behler, Alexander von Bormann, Jochen Hörisch, and Günter Oesterle, Paderborn, Schöningh, 292 pp. As the preface, ‘Das Athenäum — (k)eine Renaissance’, pp. 7–11, shows, the editors are well aware of the task set in claiming to follow the precedent of the Schlegels, Schleiermacher, Novalis et al.

The enterprise grows from a sense of Romanticism’s contemporary relevance, but — despite the dehistoricization implied by sub-title’s lack of definite article before the substantive ‘Romantik’ — they see Romanticism in fact as possessing only ‘widersprüchliche Aktualität’: being simultaneously modern and anachronistic. Thus they take on only parts of the Schegels’ mission: the mixture of genre, form, theme and style, the desire to rescue intellectual culture in the age of mass (in this case visual) media and, primarily, the dominance of provocative radical criticism, including self-criticism and the acceptance of constitutive provisionality which that implies. What they produce is however basically a work by (incidentally male-only) academics and for academics. Non-aesthetic themes are limited to K. Mueller-Vollmer, ‘Mutter Sanskrit und die Nacktheit der Südseesprachen: Das Begräbnis von Humboldts Sprachwissenschaft’, pp. 109–33, a trenchant reconstruction and condemnation of the way Wilhelm von Humboldt’s individualistic philological paradigm was colonized by Bopp’s uniformitarian comparative Indo-Germanic studies. Poetic contributions (in the narrow sense) are restricted to J. Hörisch, ‘‘Sein ist gut.” Ein Jenaer Geistergespräch vom Mai 1795 in Hause Niethammer mit Fichte, Hölderlin und Hardenberg’, pp. 279–89. For the rest, we have learned articles, strongly interdisciplinary, on literature and the arts (the Schlegels, Hoffmann, Brentano, the Fragment, Friedrich, W. von Müller/Schubert, Wagner), extensive reviews, plus brief miscellaneous reports. Judged on this basis the Athenäum is of a very high scholarly standard, fills a gap in the market, and is correspondingly welcome. See below for comments on individual articles.

Themes. As usual in recent years three linked themes dominate: Romanticism and modernity, women in Romanticism, and Romanticism and the sciences. The status and function of women has been a major focus of interest, particularly the construction of a reading standpoint adequate to writing which by definition resists classification in received categories. Bürger, Leben, contains eight essays on
six women writers. B. sees them as marginalized by gender-specific aesthetic norms and forced into a discursive ghetto, 'die mittlere Sphäre', where their fundamentally autobiographical writing is granted status neither as high nor as trivial literature, neither life nor work. Against this background B. examines their various strategies of self-negation, self-invention and self-expression. Runge, Frau, is the excellent newest instalment of the FU Berlin project Der Brief als kommunikatives und literarisches Faktum and has essays on several women writers' correspondence: H. Schwartz, 'Poesie und Poesiekritik im Briefwechsel zwischen Clemens Brentano und Sophie Mereau', pp. 33–50, shows how Brentano's attempts to integrate Mereau into his 'poetische Existent' through the letters involve a manipulative communicative strategy which violates her identity and independence; A. Runge, 'Die Dramatik weiblicher Selbstverständigung in den Briefromanen Caroline Auguste Fischers', pp. 93–114, is a fine analysis of perspectivist technique in the epistolary novels Die Honigmonathe, Der Günstling, and Margarethe, which shows how Fischer dramatizes non-communication between the sexes in the cause of emancipation. The novels are in fact a creative feminist experiment in the long-despised 'women's' genre. Stephan, Frauen, has I. Stephan, 'Weibliche und männliche Autorschaft. Zum Florentin von Dorothea Schlegel und zur Lucinde von Friedrich Schlegel', pp. 83–98, which contrasts the presentation of the heroes and notes fundamental contradictions in the realization of the androgynous ideal; also D. Böck, 'Caroline de la Motte-Fouqué. Sie hätte "eine deutsche Stael werden können"... ', pp. 139–48, a portrait of Fouqué's wife as a social and literary Don Quixote; and C. Bürger, 'Schriften, die nicht Werke sind. Zu Carolines Briefen', pp. 162–66, which examines a miniature Charakteristik of Bettina in Caroline Schlegel's letters and interprets the latter's writings as ironic rejections of received norms. Bitter Healing. German Women Writers 1700–1830. An Anthology, ed. Jeannine Blackwell and Susanne Zantop (European Women Writers Series), Lincoln — London, Nebraska U.P., 1990, 538 pp., is a set of translations designed for the comparative literature market (a purpose it serves well), but also makes a contribution to the subject per se. In fact the title is a mild misnomer (women writers aligning themselves with Classicism being excluded), so that the book divides into two equal halves of Enlightenment and Romantic authors. Thus we have in the second half texts from C. Schlegel-Schelling, H. Herz, D. Schlegel, C. A. Fischer, S. Mereau, R. Varnhagen, Günderode, and B. von Arnim. S. Zantop, 'Trivial pursuits? An introduction to German women's writing from the Middle Ages to 1830', pp. 9–50, is not at all unfocused and a useful exposition of the latest analytical categories. The choice of material is also good, being designed to offer