LITERATURE, 1830–1880
By John Guthrie, Fellow of New Hall, University of Cambridge

1. General

Reference works and general studies. A Concise History of German Literature to 1900, ed. Kim Vivian (SGLLC), 345 pp., has three chapters of interest: ‘Young Germany’ by Robert C. Holub, ‘Biedermeier’ by Lee Jennings, and ‘Realism’ by Nancy Kaiser. All are very readable and portray the main features of these movements in 15 to 25 pages in jargon-free style geared to arousing the interest of the non-specialist. The chapter on ‘Young Germany’ deals with the nature of the Young German opposition, then with the Vormärz, before moving on to Heine and Bühner. The Biedermeier chapter has a general background section dealing succinctly with some of the problems associated with the term. Writers singled out for treatment are Grillparzer, Gotthelf, Stifter, Drost-Hülshoff, Lenau, and Mörike, and a brief conclusion brings these writers together and touches on Hegel, Stauss and the wider horizons of ‘Realism’. The chapter on Realism succinctly paints in the social-historical, literary and philosophical contexts before moving on firstly to genres, then to individual authors (Storm, Raabe, Ebner-Eschenbach, Meyer, Fontane). This literary history compares positively with what little is available in English of its type and will serve the student well who is looking for an introductory survey of the period, and may also provide the odd refreshing insight to those at home in it. Another ‘literary history’ of the period, from a projected 12-volume history of German literature, is Annemarie and Wolfgang Rinsum, Frührealismus 1815–1848, DTV, 322 pp., which briefly introduces the main political and social, intellectual and cultural currents of the period. The style is casual, the coverage brisk indeed (after seven pages of political background we read: ‘Die Epoche des Frührealismus war zu Ende’). Authors and their works are presented under the headings ‘Die Zerrissenenen’, ‘Die Liberalen’, ‘Biedermeier’, with some analysis according to genre. There are generous excerpts, a glossary of terms and an index of persons, but no bibliography, not even suggestions for further reading (in a book directed at students). This might serve as an introduction and have value as a reader, but will irritate the specialist. A Glossary of German Literary Terms, 2nd, rev. and enlarged edn, ed. E.W. Herd and August Obermayer, Dunedin, 320 pp., deserves wide use by undergraduates as an initial source of information. The new edition contains approximately 100 new entries, and many revisions. Im Vorfeld der Literatur: vom Wert archivalischer
Überlieferung für das Verständnis von Literatur und ihrer Geschichte, ed. Karl-Heinz Hahn, Weimar, Böhlau, 1991, has a wide range of articles, a number of which relate to authors in our period (see below under Heine, Fanny Lewald, Fontane, Nietzsche).

Themes. Themes treated this year are: the influence of Romanticism, the relationship between legal concepts and some literary works, the theme of idleness, the Lucretia and Kaspar Hauser legends, emancipation and anti-Semitism in the theatre, aspects of women’s writing, journalism in Berlin, the literary life of Munich, literary criticism of the ‘Vormärz’, German writers and Italy, German writers and Europe, literary relationships with other European countries, the New World. Jochen Hörisch, Die andere Goethezeit, Poetische Mobilmachung des Subjekts um 1800, Munich, Fink, 240 pp., collects previously published essays by H., with one on Büchner and one on Heine.

Klaus Schuhmacher, Paragraphie. Über das gedichtete Recht, Stuttgart, Steiner, 227 pp., is a habilitation thesis showing how poetic texts are guided by juridical concerns. Poetic and legal ways of thinking are seen to stand in a fruitful mutually oppositional relationship. A wide range of writers (Thomas Mann, Kleist, Kafka, Hebbel, Keller) is discussed in the book’s first section, while the second homes in on three from the 19th c.: Grillparzer, Droste-Hülshoff, Büchner, who are seen to represent a line leading from the ‘rational-cum-magical’ through the ‘religious-cum-psychological’ to the ‘critical-cum-temporal’, all aspects of ‘transformations after 1789’. In plainer terms: Grillparzer is seen as the ‘broken’ representative of Austria during the Restoration period, harassed by censorship, an exile in his own country, Droste-Hülshoff viewed as having to justify her poetic existence because of expulsion from a three-way relationship, an outsider having to conform, leading a double life, while the fragmentariness of Büchner’s life, literally that of an emigrant, determines the fragmentary nature of his own works. These perspectives are given new emphasis by the detailed interpretations which examine the significance of juridical language as understood by each of these authors and their characters. The approach, which is theoretically supported by reference to authorities such as Benjamin, Derrida, and Sonnenmann, moves away from the idea of hunting for legal topos in literary works towards a more synthetic and diachronic angle. Incidentally, a very dense and demanding book.