

REVIEWS

Romanticism in National Context Roy Porter and Mikulaš Teich eds. (Cambridge University Press, 1988. 353 pp.)

The avowed purpose of the volume's editors was to find a middle-ground between a generalized and unifying philosophical-historical concept of Romanticism on the one hand, and the nominalist view of Romanticism as arising out of the "life experiences and activities of isolated individuals". The national context was thought to provide a framework both concrete and broad enough for discussing Romantic events. Despite some disclaimers in the introduction, a certain anticomparatist animus seemed to have been at work here. If so, the volume is (*felix culpa!*) a miscarriage. Comparatism is rampant among the contributors: Széchenyi is compared to Kierkegaard, Bilderdijk to his German contemporaries, the Welsh revival to Eastern European phenomena, to name only a few among the abundant examples of highly original comparative initiatives. At the same time the parallels between Romantic science and literature recurring in article after article strengthen the impression of a comparatism venturing in virtually uncharted territories. The very cover illustration ("Lord Byron in Albanian costume" by Thomas Phillips) nicely deconstructs the national theme and adds to the conquering vegetal anarchy of pluridialectical comparatist links and tendrils.

The volume of Porter and Teich deserves praise for trying to cover most of Europe, including some usually neglected linguistic and cultural areas (Wales for instance). It does, however, regrettably, omit Italian and Portuguese literatures from the West, Czech, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian (and Baltic) literatures from the East, and above all it ignores entirely both North- and South-American writing and culture, curiously so, because the latter would have been fruitful ground for the national-historical approach. Some of the volume's essays tended to take this approach a little too literally. Roderick Beaton's "Romanticism in Greece" (92-108) is informative and useful, but dull. "Romanticism in Russia" by John Mersereau and David Lapeza (284-316) is conceived as little more than an extended encyclopedia article; true, one that is exceptionally precise and complete, tight, well-organized and with clear characterizations. Tom Dunne's "Haunted by History: Irish Romantic Writing 1800-1850" (68-91) makes brave efforts to rise above the merely expository and, indeed, its setting up of the colonial dimension as a distinguishing feature is not without some merit (the parallel with Polish literature is striking). Including Maturin, Moore, Edgeworth among "Irish" writers is, of course, quite problematic: how many of us are willing to assign Joseph Conrad to Polish literature?

The weakest contributions to the volume – Donald Pirie on Polish Romanticism (317-344) and in particular Susan Kirkpatrick on Spanish Romanticism (260-283) – are those that were unable to avoid the mechanical temptations of a hoary kind of ideological reductionism and socioeconomic determinism. At least the (awkwardly written) article of Pirie is partly redeemed by some strong conclusions on "Polishness" as a subversive literary strategy, but it is distressing to read Kirkpatrick's presentation which seems blissfully ignorant of the debate over the existence of a Spanish Enlightenment, omits even a single mention of the name of Jovellanos and dismisses *costumbrismo* as a mere nonradical stumbling block. By contrast G. A. Williams, although he glides along some of the same paleo-Marxist discourse lines, shows, in his description of the literary and ideological situation in Wales (9-36), a learned comparatism for which the complex process of modernization is not limited just to industrialization: ultimately I find outlined in Williams' essay a useful theory of "small groups" as participants in general literary history, one that might be usefully applied to, say, *Plattdeutsch*, Catalan, *Romansch*, Baltic and other (numerically) small linguistic and ethnic groups.

Nevertheless, an approach that acknowledges a better mix between material and ideal interests (in the tradition of Max Weber rather than that of Karl Marx) has from the outset better chances of grasping the cultural

morphologies that are the natural context of any literary event. In this sense Dietrich von Engelhardt's "Romanticism in Germany" (103–133) is a little *tour de force* – an elegant, spare and lean piece managing to control with ease an overcrowded and overwritten field of study. Engelhardt assumes that his readers know much about German Romanticism but need to have their knowledge put in perspective. He does so by, among other things, bringing in a sound and refreshing acquaintance with the scientific concerns of the time and their connections with Romantic imagination and thought. (Others in the volume who do this with equally good results are G. Eriksson, N. A. Rupke and Clarissa Campbell Orr.) My only objection to Engelhardt's article is that neither the translator nor the editors bothered to reinstate the original German titles of the works cited. Gunar Eriksson's article on Scandinavian Romanticism (172–190) provides informative reading and is very strong on the influence of H. Steffens, Herder and Schelling, but is virtually reduced to the history of ideas and of science, with literature barely intruding. Stephen Bann's "Romanticism in France" (240–259) is marred by a superfluous attempt to coopt some recent critical jargons. However, his essay has the great merit of placing Chateaubriand, Mme. de Staël and Benjamin Constant at the center of French Romanticism (and not the epigones Vigny, Lamartine or Hugo). One would have liked to hear about the rhetoric of Jacobinism and about the abundant mystical (Ballanche, Saint-Martin) or Kakotopian (Sade) discourses of the time as forms of Romanticism. Still Bann's essay makes good use of Philippe Muray's path-breaking insights into the connections between socialist and occultist visions in the early nineteenth century, offers important parallels between Chateaubriand and Scott (247) and reaches some excellent conclusions on the reinvention of the past and the conflation of otherness and familiarity in French Romanticism.

Clarissa Campbell Orr has one of the most original essays in the collection. She argues convincingly (134–171) that Swiss writers (and above all the Coppet circle) served as the hub of changes in European Romanticism, while at the same time fulfilling a mediating and transitional role; moreover her combination of tough analysis, probings of political and scientific theorizing and an awareness of the role of sensibility in cultural affairs leads to a particularly rounded and nuanced image.

Szegedy-Maszák's "Romanticism in Hungary" (217–239) begins with the enunciation of four distinguishing characteristics of Hungarian Romanticism (no religious revival, weak connection between philosophy and literature, preservation of Cartesian dualism, no critique of urban civilization) that are highly interesting because they apply, I believe, to the Danubian basin as a whole. The survey of the Hungarian literature of the time is competent and crisp, with some judicious canonical revisions (Vörösmarty is placed above Arany or Petöfi), but perhaps the most exciting section of the essay for the Western reader is the detailed analysis of the life and work of István Széchenyi who is declared "the central figure of Hungarian Romanticism" (232).

An even more "monographic" approach is taken by N. A. Rupke in dealing with "Romanticism in the Netherlands" (191–216) who focuses his essay on the fascinating figure of Willem Bilderdijk and his circle of companions and disciples. Rupke builds a persuasive case for the recognition of the Dutch poet, scholar and philosopher as a towering figure and as one characteristically incorporating European Romanticism in its entirety.

The essay of Marilyn Butler, summarizing as it does her theory of the evolution of English Romanticism (37–67), is one of the most challenging in the volume. There are, to begin with, a number of dubious assumptions, above all that genetic and causative research must be privileged over the (less glamorous?) examination of outcomes and results. This kind of proposition leads Marilyn Butler to overlook the amazing correspondence or analogy of cultural developments in European areas with vastly different social-political circumstances, which seriously limits their value as exclusive genetic and determining factors. Beside, Marilyn Butler's three-phase evolutionary model ("the country movement" from James Thomson to Blake, the patriotic Romanticism of Crabbe, Scott, Coleridge and Burke, and finally the internationalist progressivism of what she called elsewhere "the Marlow group" of Shelley, Peacock, Byron and their friends) majestically disregards any matters related to style, form, imagery and aesthetic slant (i.e., the very substance of poetry). With a little more attention to literariness it becomes obvious that Professor Butler's "liberal" country Romantics are in fact staunch traditionalists, much opposed to the modernizing pressures of the political-economic powers of the day. (It is perhaps more than pure chance that the parallel prose writers – a Fielding and a Smollett – or that the quintessential "country party" figure of Goldsmith are sedulously suppressed in this presentation). I am equally intrigued by Marilyn Butler's insistence that mythological Northernism stemmed from progressive or radical impulses in

as far as it symbolized "resistances to Southern empires – ancient Rome, and its successor, the Catholic Church" (p. 45). The alternative view, widely accepted by scholars after World War II, holds that post-Herderian localisms and Germanisms were potentially (and increasingly) malignant as carriers of national-racial glorifications. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in the middle, and late- or mid-eighteenth-century mythological localizing carried, intermeshed in its center, possibilities (and intentions) for both human opening and refusal. This last example well illustrates the manner in which Marilyn Butler's propositions, even when puzzling or controversial, are informed by an immediacy and lack of inhibition that make them attractive, fresh, and stimulating. She remains the leading British scholar in Romanticism.

Taken as a whole, the collection of Porter and Teich is a strong and original contribution to our knowledge of the Romantic age. Despite its title, it is a worthwhile comparatist enterprise. Moreover, it is a step forward towards the treatment of Romanticism as a coherent historical process, in the spirit of cultural morphology.

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Jörg K. Hoensch
A History of Modern Hungary, 1867–1986
(Longman, London, 1988. 320 pp.)

No one can blame the author of this history of modern Hungary for failing to foresee the momentous events that were about to occur in Eastern Europe as his book was published. Jörg Hoensch, the author of previous studies in Slovak and Hungarian history of the interwar period, is Professor of East European History at the University of the Saarland. This book is an expanded and updated English edition of a work first published in German in 1983. It appeared in 1988 at a time when Hungary was, of course, on the threshold of major political and economic reforms. Yet virtually all political observers would at that time have shared Hoensch's view that it was "wishful thinking" to suggest that "a parliamentary system along Western democratic lines will eventually establish itself in Hungary." (p. 283) Though many of Hoensch's observations in the final pages of the book will thus seem to readers in the 1990's as completely outdated and irrelevant, the book as a whole will be a valuable source of information for a general public whose curiosity about the countries of Eastern Europe will have been piqued by the historic events occurring there.

The great merit of Hoensch's book is the clear and organized way in which he presents the basic facts of Hungarian history since the *Ausgleich* of 1867. The book contains remarkably few factual or typographical errors. Hoensch's emphasis is almost entirely on political and economic affairs. He is particularly skillful in presenting the intricacies of shifting party politics in the Dualist era and in the immediate post-World War I period. True to his statement of purpose in the book's preface, Hoensch's explication of political events is quite "free of ideological or apologetic tendencies". His judgments on controversial issues are judicious and for the most part reflect a consensus of recent historical work. Thus, in discussing Hungary's historical development from 1867 to 1918, he cites certain economic problems Hungary encountered because of the close relationship with Austria, but concludes that overall the *Ausgleich* was a benefit to Hungary and that "Hungary was by no means an economically exploited country held in a condition of dependence on Austria (p. 43). He is particularly effective and persuasive in describing the nature of the anti-Communist and anti-Russian attitudes in Hungary in the decade leading to uprising of 1956. For the most part, however, Hoensch eschews analysis and prefers to offer a straightforward narrative of historical events. Seldom does he step back from his recitation of facts to offer a personal opinion or analytical speculation.

Preferring to focus on political parties and movements, Hoensch for the most part offers only thumbnail sketches of the key political figures in modern Hungarian history. Even so his coverage is uneven. Relatively