

Romanticism, *Bildung*, and the Literary Absolute

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The notion of Romanticism has led a disputatious life ever since its uncertain beginnings in the Romantic era. In the first half of the twentieth century, as the term's use shifted slowly but irreversibly away from that of literary polemic and toward that of an academic term—away, that is, from overtly ethical and axiological battles and toward historical and hermeneutic ones—the famous debate between A. O. Lovejoy and René Wellek caused scholars to speculate whether Romanticism existed in a more than nominal fashion as a coherent entity.¹ The subsequent institutional history awards the victory to Wellek, who claimed that it did, but the production and reproduction of Romanticism as an academic field does not in the end render Romanticism a less uncertain phenomenon.² The difficulties it poses for the literary historian are well known. Romanticism is used to characterize diverse historical moments in national literatures and to privilege specific writers or movements at the expense of others; at the same time, as a style or “system of norms” (Wellek 2), it seems ensnared in recurring contradictions, with a mode that is variously utopian and despairing, naive and self-conscious, humanist (Abrams) and satanic (Praz). The larger significance of these literary and academic paradoxes revolves around their denoting, as Maurice Blanchot remarks, a Romanticism that has also stood for a “political investment,” one with “extremely diverse vicissitudes, as [Romanticism] was at times claimed by the most reactionary regimes (that of Friedrich Wilhelm in 1840 and the literary theoreticians of Nazism), and at other times . . . illuminated and understood as a demand for renovation” (163). If the term now primarily serves an academic institutional arrangement, it nonetheless comes burdened with enough cultural significance to pose the conundrum of our own historical identity.

For the difficulty Romanticism presents is not simply that of a contradictory entity, but rather that of a phenomenon that has to a great extent

emergence of a modern understanding of history, along with ideas of revolution, democracy, the nation and its literature, literature and its criticism, and the cultural and pedagogical institutions that convey and reproduce such ideas. Literary historians and critics know a particularly circular version of this predicament, which may help explain why polemics against Romanticism so visibly mark the literary-critical record: the embarrassment of indebtedness is all the more irksome when the very terms of one's polemic—an opposition, say, of romanticism to classicism—derive from the movement one wishes to castigate and escape.³ Not restricted to a preprofessional era, this double bind recurs persistently in contemporary academic criticism, sheltered though we now might be within a scholarly bureaucracy. The Romantics may no longer be undergoing chastisement of the sort meted out by Babbitt or Hulme, but Romanticism is still being accorded the treatment of an ideology available for debunking—a debunking that then is found to consist in the remarkably Romantic endeavor to “return poetry to a human form” (McGann 160).⁴ Yet an obscurity persists at the heart of these paradoxes. We have not gained much by claiming to be inside a Romanticism we cannot properly define, which may not, in fact, have an identity within which we could dwell. This obscurity is displayed in literary studies as a tension between literature and the Romantic aesthetic that defines literature as such. Texts that have seemed particularly Romantic—those of Shelley, for instance, or Rousseau or Schlegel—have in their long, curious history been judged at once irreducibly literary and yet unsatisfactory or flawed. More recently, academicians have had to confront Romanticism as the matrix of literary theory, whose various forms draw inspiration from the slippage between a text and its aesthetic or critical reception—from the fact, in other words, that literature seems able to mean both too much and too little to be reducible to the pleasure of an intuition, or to the stability of an intention or a well-wrought form. With Romanticism defining the terms of its own debate, we need to account for it as a phenomenon that not only calls itself into question, but also seems to slip away from its own standards and its own critical language, resulting in criticism that inhabits a constant, though usually only half-acknowledged, state of crisis.

The focus of this essay, an instance of critical crisis and its half-acknowledgment, is appropriate to the theme of this section: the status of the notion of the *bildungsroman*, or novel of education, in literary studies. The idea behind this genre is at once a commonplace and a minor embarrassment, and its vicissitudes replay in dramatically compressed form the paradoxes at work in the concept and history of Romanticism. Few critical terms, let alone German ones, have achieved comparable success, both within and without the academy; yet the moment one takes seriously

the definitions and implications of the word "bildungsroman," it appears to lose most or all of its referential purchase. A bildungsroman ought to be a novel that represents and enacts *Bildung*, which means considerably more than education, as will be seen; for now, we may simply observe that students of the genre are typically obliged to grapple with the possibility that the object of their study does not exist at all. Scholars who can hardly be accused of a weakness for oversophisticated literary theory (see, e.g., May) have wondered whether even Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, given the theatricality of its plot and the passivity of its eponymous hero, can be said to belong to a class of novels it supposedly exemplifies. I have sought to elaborate elsewhere the intriguing aspects of this paradox; here this seemingly modest aporia may be summarized as a tension between what literature provides and what criticism would like to receive.⁵

Or perhaps the tension rests in criticism, which seems unable either to abandon the idea of the bildungsroman or to muzzle its skepticism. However, as soon as we seriously inquire after the ontology of criticism, which is to say after that of the literature on which it depends, we engage a problem of some complexity, which has been brilliantly elaborated by Phillippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy in *The Literary Absolute*, their study of German Romanticism. Building on the work of Walter Benjamin and Maurice Blanchot, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy analyze the philosophical structure of the idea of the literary text as a "self-conscious" text, an idea now commonplace but which emerged fully for the first time in the work of Romantic writers, as an aspect of the Romantic development or elaboration of modern aesthetics. Conceptualized with more precision, the self-conscious text unfolds into the model of a text that generates its own theory: "theory itself as literature," as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, "or, in other words, literature producing itself as it produces its own theory" (12). The literary text becomes what it is—literary—in reflecting on its own constitution and thereby inscribing within itself the infinite task of criticism, hollowing out a space for readers who, in engaging the text, repeat the production of the text as it generates its own self-understanding. This self-understanding always lies on the horizon, because each production of the text in turn calls out for a further moment of completion. Literature is thus inexhaustible; it is an infinite, reflective, fragmentary movement, Schlegel's "progressive universal poetry," which Blanchot depicts as "a veritable conversion of writing: the power for the work to be and no longer to represent" (165).

Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy rightly insist that "we ourselves are implicated in all that determines both literature as auto-critique and criticism as literature" (16): the institutions of modern literary criticism would be inconceivable in the absence of this self-knowing and self-producing lit-

out. It concerns everything, to the point of conveying being itself in an intuitive, unmediated moment of insight. On the other hand, it is what one approaches endlessly, through specialized, technical processes of mediation. The absolute character of the text's truth calls for manuscript editions and variorum editions, biographies, memoirs, and all the minutiae of scholarship, as well as for the reiterated acts of interpretation we call criticism proper. One may thus claim in the abstract what the historical record confirms: not only is there no literature without criticism, but the history of the idea of literature is the history of the institutionalization of literary study. It must also be noted, however, that a contradiction very fruitful of discourse is at the core of this institution. Literature is both infinitely populist and irreducibly elitist in its aspirations, at once avant-gardist and archival in nature. As a consequence, a tension persists between academic and anti-academic discourse about literature (a literature that is always being "betrayed" by the scholarly reverence it elicits); between scholarship and criticism in the academy; and between poetics and hermeneutics in criticism. The critical endeavor, however, is as irreducible as it is conflicted, since it embodies the very self-consciousness of the literary text. Indeed, criticism has thoroughly displaced philology in the twentieth-century academy partly because the former's appeal to the "opacity" and "inexhaustibility" of the literary text (Warner 11, 16) results in the full integration of the literary absolute as an institutional rationale.⁶

Larger metaphysical and political issues are at stake in the development of literature as theory than the modest scope of academic literary criticism would lead one to conclude. For in modeling the autoproduction of reflection, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy emphasize, literature is finally an absolute not of poetry but of "poiesy or, in other words, production":

Romantic poetry sets out to penetrate the essence of poiesy, in which the literary thing produces the truth of production in itself, and thus, as will be evident in all that follows, the truth of the production of *itself*, of autopoiesy. And if it is true (as Hegel will soon demonstrate, *entirely against* romanticism) that auto-production constitutes the ultimate instance and closure of the speculative absolute, then romantic thought involves not only the absolute of literature, but literature as the absolute. (12; italics in original)

The literary absolute thus "aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject" (15), and thereby becomes the privileged other of philosophy, at once the object of philosophy's desire and an excess toward which philosophy must maintain a reserve. For our purposes two

consequences bear emphasizing. (1) This "Subject" remains in proximity to and possibly depends upon a linguistic model, since the thought of literature provides the Subject with its most immediate and exemplary self-image, though not necessarily with a fully reliable image: Hegel's hostility to Romanticism constitutes only one event in the well-known story of philosophy's profound ambivalence toward literature. This ambivalence, about which more remains to be said below, arguably informs even Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's analysis of it. (2) The Subject, in its historicity, comes into being as *Bildung*, "the putting-into-form of form" (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 104). Although the complex itinerary of the concept of *Bildung* in German and Western European intellectual history can only be suggested here, it is instructive to recall Hans-Georg Gadamer's authoritative description of *Bildung* in *Truth and Method*, lest it be imagined that Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy are overstating their case. Since *Bildung* is grounded in a linguistic model—in the literary absolute as the autoproduktivity of language—Gadamer unsurprisingly claims that this concept's signifier already contains in miniature a fusion of process, telos, and self-representation: "In *Bildung* there is *Bild*. The idea of 'form' lacks the mysterious ambiguity of *Bild*, which can mean both *Nachbild* ('image,' 'copy') and *Vorbild* ('model')" (12). And since *Bildung*, as the representation of its own striving, "remains in a constant state of further continued *Bildung*," it achieves the autoproduktivity of nature: "It is not accidental that in this the word *Bildung* resembles the Greek *physis*. Like nature, *Bildung* has no goals outside itself." Such natural acculturation is necessarily universal in its destiny: "It is the universal nature of human *Bildung* to constitute itself as a universal intellectual being" (13).

Signifying both *Nachbild* and *Vorbild*, *Bildung* encloses the structure of mimesis itself, which, through the temporalizing prefixes *nach* and *vor*, becomes the structure of typology: *Bildung* mirrors and prefigures its own fulfillment in history. *Bildung* draws out the political project inherent in the literary absolute (as Subject) by drawing out autoproduction as education. The autoproduction of the literary or speculative absolute lies in its representing-itself-to-itself, its identifying with itself: its process or historicity consists in its ongoing identification with an identity that is its own. *Bildung* makes overt the aesthetic or speculative absolute's pragmatic claim to realize itself in the phenomenal world—to form and inform pedagogical and historical process. Aesthetics in this sense is aesthetic education, as Schiller's influential treatise *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* suggests:

Every individual man, one may say, carries in himself, by predisposition and determination [*der Anlage und Bestimmung nach*], a pure ideal Man, with whose unchanging oneness it is the great task of his being,

... makes known more or less clearly in every subject [Bildung], is represented by the State, the objective and as it were canonical form in which the diversity of subjects seeks to unite itself. (Letter 4, par. 2)

It would be difficult to find a more compact rendering of the essence and itinerary of *Bildung*, which appears here in its full anthropological determination as the aesthetic unveiling of “man,” a pragmatic process of autoproduction-as-identification that is both predestined and a “great task.” The temporal unfolding of history separates the subject from the Subject, and it is in the gap of this temporal difference that the political force of *Bildung* inheres. It is not simply that the subject discovers the objective form of its own ideality in the State, though this is certainly consequential for the generally conservative political character of aesthetic ideologies. It is even more crucial, however, that the difference between subject and Subject allows the latter to reveal itself “more or less clearly” depending on the stage of development that the former occupies. Any particular subject, to the precise extent that it remains particular, will always be moving toward full self-realization, just as every determinate State will remain “more or less” what Schiller calls a “dynamic state,” moving toward the “moral” or Aesthetic State that forms the telos of *Bildung*. However, as an aesthetic event, *Bildung* demands phenomenal manifestation: this is to say, that it requires a figure, a *Bild*, exemplifying and prefiguring the identity underlying *Bildung*’s difference and deferral. In the concordant discord of history, then, certain subjects and states can, indeed must, become exemplary. They will always fall short of their own exemplarity, but exemplarity inheres in this very shortfall: *Bildung*, as Gadamer says, “remains in a constant state of further continued *Bildung*.” It is thus inherent in the logic of aesthetic education that Schiller’s treatise should regress from the universalist promise of its title to the less democratic model of history suggested in the text’s conclusion: “as a need, [the aesthetic state] exists in every finely attuned soul; as a realized fact, we are likely to find it, like the pure Church and the pure Republic, only in some few chosen circles” (27.12). And as a discourse of exemplarity, *Bildung* or aesthetic education acquires a fully hegemonic character: the “few chosen circles” of subjects capable of identifying with the universal Subject are the social groups that are by definition capable of representing mankind to itself. These few acquire the ability to identify with “pure ideal Man” by actualizing, through acculturation, their inherent human ability to perform an aesthetic judgment—a disinterested, formally universal judgment that enacts the individual subject’s point of contact with the formal universality of humanity, thus providing the subject with what Schiller calls “the gift of humanity itself”

(21.5). And since the process of acculturation or *Bildung* that actualizes this potential will always in turn be found to have manifested itself most purely in a historically specific site (classical Greece; Germany, England, or, more generally, Europe; the educated classes; the male psyche; and so on), the narrative of *Bildung* has real political significance and is in fact inseparable not just from the rhetoric of class struggle and colonial administration in the nineteenth century, but more generally from the very thought of history itself, as the “individual narrative of self-formation is subsumed in the larger narrative of the civilizing process, the passage from savagery to civility, which is the master narrative of modernity” (Lloyd 134).⁷

This account of *Bildung* is admittedly sketchy, given that, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy remark, the concept “brings together shaping and molding, art and culture, education and sociality, and ultimately history and figuration” (36), but it returns us to the task—mercifully limited in some respects, far-reaching in others—of understanding what happens when *Bildung* acquires the suffix *Roman* and the institution of criticism is forced to confront more directly its origins in the question of literature. As already indicated, the findings are ambiguous. It should at least be more obvious at this point why studies of the Bildungsroman generally display a deep investment in this genre’s existence, since it can now be established that the bildungsroman exhibits a certain modality of the literary absolute in offering itself as the literary form of *Bildung*. If, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy claim, the literary absolute “aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject,” and if *Bildung* names the actualization of the Subject as pedagogy—as the story of an “education in life”—then the notion of the bildungsroman returns us to the literary armed with what Schiller would call “the determination [we] have received through sensation”: the literary will now be absolute only as a mirror for the anthropological subject of *Bildung*.⁸ And if criticism depends upon literature (as theory) to furnish it with the model of its own possibility, and if the bildungsroman is the pragmatic, humanist rewriting of literature-as-theory, then it is understandable that criticism as an institution, like Lacan’s infant before its mirror, should perform a “jubilant assumption of its specular image” when faced with the notion of this genre—and should therefore find itself subject to a certain irreducible paranoia, since, as we have seen, the bildungsroman is quite possibly a “phantom” genre (Sammons 239).

And since the literary object recedes from the genre that purports to subjectify it, the question of the literary absolute and its relation to aesthetics must be taken up again. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy occasionally suggest literature’s irreducibility to the Subject, but their pathbreaking study tends to underplay or forget the most incisive gesture in Walter Benjamin’s thesis: his contention that Romantic criticism understands “reflection in

Samuel Weber affirms, “is nothing less unusual, idiosyncratic, or, if you prefer, original, than the effort to elaborate a notion or practice of ‘reflexivity’ that would not ultimately be rooted in the premise of a constitutive subject” (310). Weber’s commentary elucidates nonsubjective reflection in terms of what Benjamin calls “the irony of form,” which Weber unpacks as “a practice of writing which, precisely by undermining the integrity of the individual form, at the same time allows the singular ‘work’ to ‘survive’” (315). Rather than represent an internalization of reflection as subjectivity, this irony would reside in the excess of form over its own self-constitution as form: in the mechanical linguistic repetitions that destroy the singularity of the artwork while permitting it to emerge. This mechanical element in art is what Benjamin calls the prosaic, and criticism, Benjamin writes, exists as a strange form of presentation [*Darstellung*] of this prosaic nucleus:

Criticism is the presentation of the prosaic kernel in each work. The concept “presentation” is thereby to be understood in the chemical sense, as the generation of one substance [*Erzeugung eines Stoffes*] through a determinate process to which others are subjected [*unterworfen*]. This is what Schlegel meant when he said of Wilhelm Meister that the work “does not merely judge itself, it also presents itself [*stellt sich dar*].” (109)

Commenting on this difficult passage, Weber draws attention to its sacrificial logic: “The romantic idea of criticism thus turns out to consist in a process of ‘subjection’: ‘others’ are subjected so that something can *matter*.” And then, tacitly reversing the poles of Benjamin’s chemical analogy, he continues: “As a result of this subjection to the other, criticism ‘stellt sich dar,’ *sets itself forth*, sets forth, departing from itself to become something else, something lacking a proper name and which Benjamin, and after him de Man, will call ‘allegory’” (317; emphasis in original). It is perhaps not immediately clear how or to what criticism subjects itself in this passage, but Weber’s proposed reversal, though unexplained, is consequent: criticism is always the criticism or “*Darstellung*” of itself, and thus is a subjection of itself to an alterity which is itself. All of the terms in this sacrificial story can in fact be substituted for each other, as Benjamin’s passive and paratactic syntax allows either “criticism” or the “prosaic kernel” to occupy the place either of “the one substance” or of the “others.” It must be noted that this narrative is still essentially that of *Bildung*, when *Bildung* is unfolded to its full dialectical model and understood as the ironic understanding of its own impossibility. But there is another story mapped onto the sacrificial and substitutive one both in Benjamin’s text and in Weber’s, legible in

the political term “subjection”: the story of an *Unterwerfung*, a sub-jection or “throwing under” of a plural otherness. In this sense the anonymous “others” in Benjamin’s sentence have no existence except as placeholders for the violence of the “determinate process” of *Darstellung*: they are thus irrecoverable, inaccessible to the substitutive process that they make possible. The sacrificial exchange, which leads back to the autoproduktive world of natural production (*Erzeugung*) and *Bildung*, could not exist without this violent *Unterwerfung*, which nonetheless remains radically heterogeneous to it. The “thrown-under” others thus reiterate an alterity irrecoverable to, yet constitutive of, the *subject*; this is also to say that they mark the mechanical insistence that Benjamin, deliberately contesting the subjectivist model of irony, terms the “irony of form.” Criticism, the “presentation” of this irony, is thus the figure of its own unwitting and unstoppable “subjection,” an ongoing throwing-under of understanding that, as Weber reminds us, is what “Benjamin, and after him de Man, will call ‘allegory.’”

What this might mean becomes clearer on examining the passage to which Benjamin refers us in Friedrich Schlegel’s famous essay on *Wilhelm Meister*. For Schlegel, *Wilhelm Meister* is so “thoroughly new and unique” a text that it can only be understood “in itself [*aus sich selbst*]” (133); when reading it we must exercise what Kant would call a purely reflective judgment, deriving our generic concept [*Gattungsbegriff*] from the object in its particularity:

Perhaps one should thus at once judge it and not judge it—which seems to be no easy task. Luckily it is one of those books that judge themselves, and so relieve the critic of all trouble. Indeed, it doesn’t just judge itself; it also presents itself [*stellt sich auch selbst dar*]. (133–34)

Critical representations of the text “would be superfluous [*überflüssig*].” But the strange order of *Darstellung* that Benjamin read in the formation of the literary absolute insures that a certain reading, however superfluous, will be called for. A few sentences later we read that the novel “disappoints as often as it fulfills customary expectations of unity and coherence,” and that it in fact fails to judge itself insofar as it fails to pass from the level of the particular to that of the general—a failure that signals the return of the formerly “superfluous” reader:

If any book has genius, it is this one. If this genius had been able to characterize itself in general as well as in particular, no one would have been able to say anything further about the novel as a whole, and how one should take it. Here a small supplement [*Ergänzung*] remains possible, and a few explanations will not seem useless or superfluous

isfactory, and this and that in the middle of the text will be found superfluous and incoherent [*überflüssig und unzusammenhängend*]. And even he who knows how to distinguish the godlike from artistic willfulness will feel something isolated in the first and last reading, as though in the deepest and most beautiful harmony and oneness the final knotting of thought and feeling were lacking. (133–34)

The text judges itself but does not judge itself; it accounts for its own particularity but fails to inscribe itself in a genre (*Gattung*). And the reader, initially suspended between judging and not judging, then made *überflüssig* by the text's self-reflexive power, finally becomes a supplement (*Ergänzung*) that is *nicht überflüssig*. This reader, a master reader who knows how to distinguish "the godlike from artistic willfulness," performs an aesthetic judgment and necessarily finds the text wanting—just as critics once found Shelley or Rousseau or Romanticism wanting, and just as Hegel, in the *Aesthetics*, was to find Schlegel's work of an "indefinite and vacillating character," "sometimes achieving too much, sometimes too little" (63). But nothing could be more suspect than this magisterial act of judgment, for it has been generated by the text's inability to account for itself—a predicament replayed in the lucid incoherence of Schlegel's own theoretical narrative.

Theory, here, is "literary" precisely to the extent that it is unable to know its own origin, as the literary recedes from theory in the very act of constituting it. Theory becomes theory out of self-resistance: a paradox nicely exemplified by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's *The Literary Absolute*, which achieves its insight into the Subject's dependence on literature only by remaining blind to what Benjamin conveys to us as literature's disruptive *subjection* of the Subject.¹⁰ In thinking about such "subjection" in rhetorical terms as a nonsubjective, formal irony, Benjamin remains faithful to Schlegel's own much-misunderstood presentation of irony. In the passage just examined, for instance, irony must be thought of precisely in Benjamin's terms as an excess of exemplarity or of form, a surplus or remainder that produces the judging subject by disrupting the dialectical passage from particular to general. When Schlegel goes on to characterize *Wilhelm Meister* in terms of "the irony that hovers over the whole work" (137), he is referring to a textuality that, in this most exemplary of texts, is *überflüssig und unzusammenhängend*, "as though in the deepest and most beautiful harmony and oneness the final knotting of thought and feeling were lacking."¹¹ And thus when Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe that irony is "the very power of reflection or infinite reflexivity—

the other name of speculation" (86), they are in a crucial sense very far from Schlegel and paradoxically close to the formulations that Hegel directs against Schlegel in the name of speculative thought, when he defines irony in the *Aesthetics* as "the principle of absolute subjectivity" (67) and condemns its "concentration of the ego into itself, for which all bonds are snapped and which can live only in the bliss of self-enjoyment. This irony was invented by Friedrich Schlegel, and many others have babbled about it or are now babbling about it again" (66).

When Hegel goes on to insist, in the raised tone that so frequently accompanies his discussions of irony, that "if irony is taken as the keynote of the representation, then the most inartistic of all principles is taken to be the principle of the work of art" (68), he is identifying criticism's failure as a failure to prevent irony from causing criticism to fail to become criticism. Literature is another name for this failure, and the bildungsroman is an exemplary site in which criticism's failure and its failure to fail become legible as the simultaneous co-implication and incompatibility of literature and aesthetics, thanks to the illegibility of "the most inartistic of all principles," irony. Irony, in this sense, may be termed Romantic, but only if one understands Romanticism as another version of the literary event: the event of a literariness "absolute" only in its irreducibility to a subjectivism and a humanism that it nonetheless inspires.

Notes

- 1 For a survey of the history of the term "Romantic," see Wellek 2–22.
- 2 To say this is not in any way to deny that the term "Romanticism" functions quite effectively as what John Rieder calls a "sign of specialization" within the bureaucratic university—that is, as a sign that "projects a blandly obvious homogeneity of endeavor to the outside, and yet constitutes itself internally as a continual reworking and redefinition of its substance" (9), thereby allowing a "field" to be marked out, funded, and reproduced. The institutional power of the term does not close off its uncertainty, however, insofar as Romanticism may be understood to name the emergence of, among other things, the modern pedagogical institution itself, particularly as regards the study and teaching of literature, as we shall see.
- 3 For a representative text from the modernist period, see Hulme. The opposition of classicism to romanticism was popularized by A. W. Schlegel and Mme de Staël in the early nineteenth century; see Wellek 8–9.
- 4 Compare with Woodmansee, who claims that the associationist aesthetic of Francis Jeffrey "rings refreshingly current" when contrasted with the "abstraction from . . . local affiliations or 'interests'" demanded by "Coleridgean" notions of art (127, 132). Woodmansee's binary exaggerations (conjuring a Jeffrey whose aesthetic is devoid of all "abstraction," a Coleridge hostile to "local affiliations") labor in the service of a Romantic humanism that remains unquestioned. This is as good a place as any to note the appearance of Francis Jeffrey in McGann, who, confronting "the now widespread

of the *Lyrical Ballads*: "This will never do" (20). It is a curious moment: a prominent, late-twentieth-century Romanticist performs a flashy act of identification with British Romanticism's symbolic opponent, precisely at a point in McGann's text in which McGann's own involvement in Romanticism is being summoned up and negotiated.

- 5 See my *Phantom Formations*, especially ch. 2, from which the foregoing and all subsequent paragraphs in the present essay have been extracted and adapted.
- 6 I thank John Rieder for drawing my attention to Warner's essay. Graff provides the classic account of the struggle between philologists and belletristic critics during the early years of the integration of literature into the university in the United States. For a history of English studies in Britain, see Baldick, and for the development of professional literary study in France, Germany, and Spain, see, respectively, Compagnon, Hohendahl, and Godzich and Spadaccini.
- 7 This "master narrative" is interwoven through the modern bureaucratic state in numerous ways, not the least as the story of what Friedrich Kittler calls the socialization ("Über die Sozialisation"), and Michel Foucault the disciplining, of subjects. Exemplary or aesthetic pedagogy occurs not just as metanarrative but as the concrete and microscopic practices summarized as the civilization or socialization of a self. The institutions responsible for *Bildung* in this sense would include the nuclear family, the schools, and certain forms of mass media, as well as the university; and, as Kittler suggests, the institution of literature has an important role to play in this scenario: not just as a discourse exemplifying national or ethnic identity, but as a pedagogical instrument central to the production of "individuals" on all levels of the socialization process. See Kittler, *Discourse Networks* 3–173, for a discussion of the new centrality of the mother in primary education around 1800 (such that she becomes the *Bildnerin*, the erotic site of *Bildung's* origins [50]) and an analysis of coeval developments in German educational bureaucracies and in technologies of pedagogy and reading. Kittler's reading of the role of the bildungsroman in this context is most fully laid out in his long essay "Über die Sozialisation." For a Foucauldian reading of *Bildung*, see von Mücke 161–206. For a helpful study of the idea of *Bildung* in nineteenth-century German thought, see Bruford.
- 8 See Schiller, letter 20, par. 3. My citation from Schiller alludes to the aesthetic moment proper in his theory: the point at which the subject, having passed through sensuous determination and developed the autonomous power of reason, must harmonize these faculties in a moment of disinterested free play: "we must call this condition of real and active determinability the *aesthetic [den ästhetischen]*" (20.4; Schiller's italics).
- 9 The "strictest sense" in this context is Fichtean.
- 10 The resistance of theory to itself is one of the central themes of the work of Schlegel's closest modern reader, Paul de Man; see the title essay in *The Resistance to Theory* (3–20). For a shrewd critique of Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy's *Literary Absolute* along de Manian lines, see Newmark.
- 11 Irony here is the "permanent parabasis" of Schlegel's famous Fragment 668; see the *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel Ausgabe* 18: 85.

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