

at anonymous editors whose work cannot be assessed. But the argument, besides being *ad hominem*, begs the question of whether a “socialized text” is always or usually or ever “improved” by the publisher. Further, Reiman pretends that an editor who has chosen a copy-text using Greg’s rationale is left with only the stupidest possible emendation procedures. Even if Reiman meant only to show that some editors are stupid, he appears to believe that no one can edit intelligently according to the Greg-Bowers school, and he apologizes for his own previous efforts in that line (116–17).

The Study of Modern Manuscripts is an extraordinary book, written by a thoughtful, careful, and committed scholar with whose reasoning I sometimes disagree. When A. E. Housman scorned the editors of his day for preferring rules to the application of thought to textual criticism, he described writing and thinking so far removed from the style and depth offered by Donald Reiman that comparisons are unthinkable. This book is thought-provoking and informative. If it occasionally stoops to rhetorical overkill, it often brings acute reasoning to specific textual problems. If it occasionally offers a flawed argument, it often offers compelling ones. If it is occasionally reactionary in its approach to theory, it is more often specific and accurate in its description of the problems we all face. I do not think this is an easy book, though it is never ambiguous or obscure. Its difficulty derives from the complexity and immensity of the textual conditions it seeks to master and from the unfortunate persuasiveness of its weakest points.

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Martha Woodmansee. *The Author, Art, and The Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. Pp. xv+200. \$29.50.

If the current dominance of New Historicist and Cultural Materialist perspectives on romanticism has produced comparative indifference to previously central textual matter of the period, the omission in question would most obviously concern romantic, “high” aesthetic and epistemological theory. Paradoxically, however, the continuing deregulation of the romantic canon and its hierarchies of signification—carried forward, for example, by Alan Liu’s, Marjorie Levinson’s and Jerome Christensen’s recent powerful critiques of Wordsworth, Keats, and Byron, yet also by the recovery of “uneducated” poets and by the reclamation of women writers into an expanding romantic literary curriculum—in effect replicates

SiR, 34 (Fall 1995)

and even intensifies a central motif of romantic theory. Namely, the passionate (if not always theoretically reflexive) mobilization of institutional and cognitive resources to the liberation of the romantic signifier—perhaps a belated attempt at contemplating romanticism’s notoriously incomplete revolutionary aspirations within the simulacra of academic writing and curricular reform—uncannily resembles the Godwinian project of a radical Enlightenment, an utterly rational and egalitarian conversation among individuals possessed of transparent minds and immortal bodies. For as Godwin and, *mutatis mutandis*, also Bentham, Kant, Schiller, and the Jena Romantics grasped all too well, the ultimate telos of “pure” theory involves its “absolute” convergence with the Social or the Real, that is, with the empirical, cultural objects whose material nature and practical functioning it seeks to determine. To attempt a shorthand version of the Jena Romantics’ aesthetic dispensation, the Real is the destiny of “pure” theory—“*Die Welt muss romantisiert werden*,” Novalis says—in that the social process shall fulfill *unconsciously* its preappointed rational mission, a mission reflexively articulated by romanticism’s extensive disciplinary progeny, including legal theory, moral philosophy, political economy, and . . . aesthetics. The contemporary materialist critique of romanticism’s aesthetic ideology thus stands in a necessarily supplemental relation to romanticism’s own cultural aspirations, however provisional and self-conflicted these may be: that is, it strives to be simultaneously monument and fragment, institution and insurrection, authority and irony—a necessarily self-consuming answer. Tellingly divided in its intellectual allegiances to Neo-Marxism and post-Freudian psychoanalysis, respectively, cultural critique thus not only busies itself with uncovering material constraints and reclaiming subaltern voices and texts obscured or displaced by romanticism’s dominant aesthetic but, in so doing, simultaneously (if inadvertently) continues to advance the quintessential romantic project of *aestheticizing the Real*. From Novalis and Schlegel to Terry Eagleton and Slavoj Žižek, cultural critique has established itself as the consummately incomplete romantic act; promising salvation to a reality deemed insufficiently reflexive (or “politically unconscious”) as to function *ethically*, it wears its own ethos of incompleteness on its sleeve, as evidenced by the field’s interminable debate over canonicity and a romantic curriculum and by its concurrent efforts at procuring theoretical justifications for the intellectual dispensation of the day. Conspicuously depotentiated, detotalized, and reflexive, the ornate proceduralism of academic critique today all but reproduces the “arabesque” logic of Schlegel’s early collections of aphorisms; that is, “critique” today processes the interminable irony of Schlegel’s *Kritik* at an institutional level (which is to say, “seriously”): it eventuates as a continual auto-da-fé of romanticism’s alleged subscribership to theories of a “pure” aesthetic state.

If the contemporary institutions and idioms of critique are a belated effect of the very (romantic) mode of cultural cognition, how are they to *think* romantic aesthetic theory as a genuinely historical and social phenomenon? For Martha Woodmansee the answer lies in contextualizing major documents in the history of aesthetic thought, such as Kant's *Critique of Judgment* or Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, to the point that their autonomous and formalist rhetoric no longer suffices. Arguing that it is in "the interplay between legal, economic, and social questions on the one hand and philosophical and aesthetic ones on the other that critical concepts and principles as fundamental as that of authorship achieved their modern form" (47), *The Author, Art, and the Market* goes about its task of contextualizing aesthetic theory with impressive erudition, focusing in particular on the rise and institutionalization of aesthetic theory in Germany during the second half of the eighteenth century. As Woodmansee notes early on, the "purity" of romantic aesthetics, its familiar transcendental "gesture" of writing constitutes a *functional* and deeply *social* practice, even as (or, perhaps, precisely insofar as) such aesthetic writing purports to evade the social. Woodmansee's identification with a loosely (never orthodox) materialist mode of cultural historiography clearly shapes her sense of scholarly evidence, such as when she notes that "reviews of books, exhibits, and performances, authors' prefaces, textbooks, handbooks, manuals for the consumer, and the like reveal more clearly than ostensibly *pure* philosophical treatises the concrete problems 'art' was invented to solve" (4). Shifts in reading-taste no less than in the theories justifying one mode of aesthetic production over another are convincingly ascribed to "far reaching changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of reading material," changes, Woodmansee observes, as a result of which the older "instrumentalist theory . . . was found to justify the wrong works" (32). Here as on other occasions, however, Woodmansee's contextualizing procedures imply rather than account for such a causal relation between the cultural and social process, thereby throwing into relief the often associative and thus insufficiently reflected logic of contextualist scholarship in general.

Viewing her "volume as but one chapter in th[e] larger project" of "complicating disciplinary accounts of . . . pure philosophical reflection by resituating it in the larger debate over culture in which it originally functioned" (7), Woodmansee discusses the cultural logic of aesthetic disinterestedness in the work of Karl Philipp Moritz and Immanuel Kant, and the gradual displacement of the "principle of imitation" by the "principle of pleasure." As she notes, the functional thrust of an increasingly psychological set of terms for the description of art and aesthetic experience inevitably stratifies society and deepens already existing divisions in a culture, effectively producing "an audience sharply and most unevenly

divided between the many and the few, between the ‘thousands who have no eye for the beautiful’ and the ‘men of taste’ . . .” (21). The perhaps unself-conscious rationale for an increasingly discriminating mode of aesthetic production and response—as well as for the “high-brow” aesthetic theories arguing the logical and objective necessity of such psychological discriminations—Woodmansee convincingly locates in “the creation of a literate middle class” (22–23). In her subsequent chapters Woodmansee focuses on the relationship between the ideational theory of genius and the material disposition of the aesthetic agent under an evolving copyright-law; on the pragmatic thrust of Schiller’s idea of aesthetic autonomy in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* and in his remarkable discussion of Bürger; on the policing of reading-habits in Johann Adam Bergk’s 1799 study, *Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen (The Art of Reading Books)*; and on Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s prefatory discriminations between a vulgar “public” and an exclusive clerisy optimistically referred to as “the People”; and finally on Wordsworth’s ardent pursuit of copyright-reform with arguments frequently borrowed from his seemingly unrelated and disinterested aesthetic reasoning in the prefaces of 1800 and 1815. While her intuitions regarding the underlying social mission of aesthetic theory seem generally persuasive and, in their counter-intuitive nature, often innovative, Woodmansee’s study also exhibits some structural problems. At least in light of its ambitious subtitle (“Rereading the History of Aesthetics”), the book simply strikes one as too short and, in its frequently leap-frog movement between various authors and national contexts seems too allusive, hasty, and simply impatient with itself. Given the amount of research on her subject (of which, to judge by her impressive bibliography, Woodmansee is keenly aware), the six pages set aside for the subject of Gender and Art (dedicated to Sophie La Roche’s *Fräulein von Sternheim*), or her thumbnail sketch of the evolution of eighteenth-century aesthetic theory in Baumgarten, Batteux, Moses Mendelssohn, and Karl Philipp Moritz in similarly few pages (11–18) inevitably yield but a very rough outline of the subject, with interpretive and rhetorical issues frequently remaining unexamined.

More seriously, perhaps, weighs Woodmansee’s reluctance to engage any of her contexts closely, viz., as rhetorical performances of potentially less transparent ideological import than might initially be assumed. To cite but one instance, her conjugation of Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters* with his review-essay on Bürger’s ballads (57 ff.) certainly enriches critical thinking about the socio-cultural function of the ballad at the end of the eighteenth century, both in Germany and in England. Remarkably cognate to Wordsworth’s aesthetic objections to Bürger in the “Preface” (1800), Schiller faults the latter’s ballads for failing to grasp and, in their internal narrative and rhetorical organization, to reflect that Homer’s world has

yielded to a highly stratified society, indelibly marked by “a great gulf between the *elect* of a nation and the *masses*” (quote on 274). Yet Schiller’s well-known remedy—to “idealize,” universalize, and to target the reading-audience’s cerebral rather than affective capacities—draws a characteristically narrow, almost peremptory assessment from Woodmansee: “Anticipating today’s conservative culture critics,” she writes, “Schiller refuses to see in the resources tapped by Bürger a source of significant new vitality rather than a symptom of decline” (79). Such an axiomatically liberal (or Whiggish) view inevitably does not probe for a possibly more profound (though, admittedly, not necessarily more endearing) ideological import in Schiller’s argument. By contrast, a more patient *reading* of Schiller on Bürger would likely have brought into closer focus Schiller’s (necessarily implicit) conception of the aesthetic as a *social practice* which progressively enfranchises the very middle-class communities to which Woodmansee has persuasively ascribed the rise of this discipline all along. What Schiller exalts as the aesthetic “ideal” instantiates (i.e., produces *unself-consciously*) socio-economic order; it is at once a demographically specific, ideological consensus *and* performs the necessary maintenance on that consensus in the unreflected guise of aesthetic “judgment” and its corresponding “sensus communis.” Hence the ideal’s representation never truly evolves in fully reflexive, propositional form but, on the contrary, warrants the epithet “aesthetic” precisely insofar as it is being mediated as the *formally discriminating practice of aesthetic judgment*, which is to say, not as private belief but as the social demonstration or avocation of such belief. Precisely insofar as the formal and evaluative discriminations undergirding Schiller’s review merely replicate already prevailing, social and material divisions within the deceptively “playful” or “virtual” sphere of the aesthetic, the contrast between Bürger and Schiller cannot be reduced to that between a “vital” literary populism and the repressive class(ic)ism of middle- and high-brow art, between the authentic ethos of the Social and its studious evasion by an aesthetic elite. In fact, Woodmansee’s own exposition strongly suggests that we are witnessing the clash between two *equally contingent* sets of socio-cultural preferences, with each one stipulating an equally distinctive representational (i.e., aesthetic) form for its mediation. In Bürger’s case, such mediation takes the form of a sensational and formally more or less invariant mode of textual production stimulating a consuming and widespread readerly “interest,” whereas in the case of Schiller a necessarily different set of beliefs and socio-cultural desires is mediated by the writer’s conspicuous professional and disciplinary ethos and in an analogously exacting, complex, and formally “discriminating” middle-class reading practice.

Notwithstanding its occasionally underdeveloped interpretive procedure,

The Author, Art, and the Market offers a strong introduction to the aesthetic debates and their functional socio-economic context in Germany and England, giving convincing indications of the *functional* socio-cultural pragmatics undergirding the ostensibly disinterested and autonomous formal transactions of aesthetics, namely, “the creation of a literate middle class” (23) perched “in a transitional phase between an aristocratic age and the democratic patronage of the marketplace” (41). For much-needed further work on this complex and in its implications far-reaching subject, Woodmansee’s study will prove a crucial resource.

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