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Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in
Germany (review)

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Studies, adds to a growing corpus of scholarly investigations of questions of alterity in German culture, and lays the groundwork for further investigations.

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—Nina Berman

Clio the Romantic Muse: Historicizing the Faculties in Germany.

By Theodore Ziolkowski. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004. 240 pages. \$36.95.

This elegant, erudite essay demonstrates “how profoundly Clio, the muse of history, permeated every aspect of thought during the Romantic era” (ix). Concentrating on the first decades of the 19th century and the four traditional “faculties” of the university, Ziolkowski explores the sudden conviction that, in Karl von Savigny’s phrase, “the historical sense has awakened everywhere” (cited, 124). The French Revolution—together with the “epistemological revolution” associated specifically with Kant but culminating a longer and wider “disenchantment of the world”—triggered “an intensified awareness of time itself” (9). (Less convincingly, Ziolkowski throws in the “industrial revolution” as a third revolutionary rupture. It does not play much of a role in his detailed exposition.) This awakening historical sense was *Romantic* in “the shared view that human knowledge constitutes a vital whole [which could be] grasped in its totality only through a twofold approach employing both history and system” (173).

Ziolkowski’s narrative touchstone is the foundation of the University of Berlin in 1810. His key exemplars from the four “faculties” of the traditional university all passed through the University of Berlin in its moment of crystalizing impact: Hegel in Philosophy, Schleiermacher in Theology, Savigny in Law, and Hufeland and Reil in Medicine. Moreover, the new University of Berlin embodied “a wholly Romantic theory of the university” (16) envisioned primarily by a group of brilliant thinkers who had gathered in Jena in the 1790s—Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, Wilhelm von Humboldt—all of whom believed utterly in what Schelling called “the living unity of all sciences” (cited, 18). They believed further that this “unity of knowledge should be incorporated institutionally” (23). The university must be an “organic whole” where *Wissenschaft* could be conceived as a worthy end in itself, devoted to the “realm of hitherto unsolved problems” (25). The so-called “higher faculties”—theology, law, and medicine—were too career-oriented to fulfill this ideal. As Schleiermacher summarized this whole body of thought in his crucial *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense* (1808), “the faculty of philosophy should constitute the center of the university” (23). Only under such a structure could the individual come to “understand how his particular discipline is related to the harmonious structure of the whole” (18).

This systematic holism could only be achieved—individually or culturally—through historical reconstruction. “For the individual, education or *Bildung* consists in acquiring for himself what the world spirit has already learned in the course of history” (55), in the exemplary formulation of Hegel. As he argued, “the consciousness of the individual in its development recapitulates the historical development of the world spirit” (43). This idea that “ontogeny recapitulated phylogeny” held sway across the Romantic moment from its literal exposition in von Baer’s laws of embryological physiology to its extended sense as a philosophy of self-formation, or *Bildung* (139). More precisely, the key thinkers of the Romantic moment came to believe that *histori-*

cal understanding was the essential constituent of a *systematic* understanding; the task was simultaneously “to systematize history and to historicize reason” (53). This was not just Hegel’s predilection. In field after field, Ziolkowski finds a key figure making the same argument. Hegel wrote: “[T]he study of the history of philosophy is the study of philosophy itself” (cited, 44). Friedrich Schlegel put it similarly: “[H]istory is a *becoming* philosophy and philosophy a *completed* history” (cited, 177). And Gustav Hugo, the founder of the “historical school of law,” wrote: “[T]he whole science of law is nothing else than the history of law” (cited, 107). Savigny, Hugo’s great successor, insisted the proper study of law was precisely to seek systematic understanding only through a painstakingly historical understanding. Ziolkowski points out that just these principles animated Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *On Religion* (1799), which asserted that “[r]eligious men are wholly historical” (cited, 87). That is, religion is always a concrete worldview. One can never abstract away from “positive religion” but must, instead, *historicize*: find when “every positive religion appears most youthful and fresh [. . .] during its development and its blossoming” (cited, 86). For Schleiermacher, as for Savigny and Hegel, system could only be anchored in history: “any meaningful theology must be based on a historical understanding of religion” (97).

The case of medicine seals Ziolkowski’s argument. He identifies as a decisive “paradigm shift” in the life sciences at the end of the 18th century “the temporalization of science [. . .] synchronicity yielded to diachronicity, status to development, and mechanics to dynamics” (139). The autobiographical writings of Carl Gustav Carus attested to the driving impulse of the age: “the principle of a *higher unity*, emerging in the light of *Naturphilosophie*” (cited, 163). As the term *Naturphilosophie* suggests, the key figure here was Friedrich Schelling, who insisted that nature be understood as process, not product, as *natura naturans*, not *natura naturata*, and hence temporalized to discern its “productivity, genesis, and development” (144). “The process that Schelling calls *Bildung* ‘occurs through epigenesis (through metamorphosis or dynamic evolution)’” (144). Ziolkowski endorses Robert Richards’ positive assessment in *The Romantic Conception of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) of the role of Schelling and *Naturphilosophie* for the history of science (xii, 146), affirming that “the majority of physicians and naturalists in Germany for the next few decades were profoundly, often passionately, committed to the notions of *Naturphilosophie*” (146).

In his conclusion, Ziolkowski justly claims to have demonstrated “the striking parallels between Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and the works of his Romantic contemporaries, as well as their common source in Herder” (172). It is with this last point that I would like to conclude. Indeed, Ziolkowski does clearly point to Herder at every turn in his account. He begins with the observation that “it was Hegel’s ambition, as it had been Herder’s [. . .] to encompass in a single volume the entire knowledge of Western civilization” (53). Turning to Schleiermacher, Ziolkowski observes that in an early essay, “On Instruction in History,” the theologian “sounds almost like Herder” (81). Similarly, Hugo’s great *Lehrbuch der Geschichte des römischen Rechts* (1790) “displays a pronounced similarity to Herder’s closely contemporaneous philosophy of history” (108). Savigny explicitly studied and incorporated Herder into his methodology, becoming in the process “as all-encompassing as Herder” (110). In the treatment of the life sciences Ziolkowski makes the most important case. “Young naturalists sought, in particular, to find in nature correspondences to the progressive idea of Herder” (139). “What has been called ‘the peculiar relationship between the concepts of history and

ontogeny in German Romanticism' can be traced back to Herder, whose *Ideas* are quoted by Schelling in his *Draft* and cited frequently by the naturalists of the period" (154). Ziolkowski points to Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, "the leading promulgator and popularizer of *Naturphilosophie*" (155), who came under the personal influence of Herder in Weimar and whose greatest work "bears more than a superficial resemblance to the *Ideas* of his mentor Herder" (156). As a scholar who has devoted many years and pages to trying to establish the importance of this connection, I welcome Ziolkowski's book as congenially as he welcomed the parallel endeavors of Robert Richards.

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History, Fiction, and Germany: Writing the Nineteenth-Century Nation.

By Brent O. Peterson. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005. viii + 360 pages. \$54.95.

The imagining of a sense of national identity and its evolution from constructed myth to widely shared conviction has become a prominent topic of cultural and literary analysis. It is particularly significant in the case of Germany in view of its rapid development from a congeries of loyalties to principalities large and small along with unclear geographical and linguistic definitions at the beginning of the nineteenth century to a widely shared *kleindeutsch* patriotism under Prussian auspices after unification in 1871. Brent Peterson sees this change of consciousness as having been imaged in literature: "When consensus about a German identity finally arrived, if it ever did, it was almost certainly mediated in fictional form" (75). This is not, however, primarily a matter of the canonical tradition; except for Kleist and agitators like Arndt and Körner, "national literature" was not "synonymous with the literature of nationalism," which sought "a level of literary quality on a par with France and England" (74). The project of imagining the nation is more to be found in popular literature, in the historical novels that large numbers of people read. There are some well-known names here, such as Fontane and Fanny Lewald, in addition to authors on the periphery of the cultural memory like Fouqué or Alexis, and a number of others most of us are unlikely to have read or even heard of. A central figure is Luise Mühlbach, whose cause Peterson has been championing for some time, though not on qualitative grounds. He admits that "most of what ordinary people read was produced by writers of middling ability"; "some texts may be dreadful" (25). The historical novel competed with the rise of narrative history by imagining personal characteristics and private sensibilities, especially of ordinary people normally not within the purview of academic history.

Peterson has examined a large corpus of texts, finding in his extremely detailed observations not a linear evolution but a wide variety of opinions and insecurities of attitude about the definition and boundaries of "Germany," the identification of and the relationship to legitimate authority, and the prospects for the future. Much of his discussion is concentrated on several historical nodes and the ways in which their understanding was rewritten in fiction. One of these is the evolution of Friedrich II to "Old Fritz," from the dour, misanthropic, French-speaking, ruthless military aggressor to "Germany's favorite uncle," who "becomes a commoner," "wise and approachable, feared yet benevolent, just, and most important, prototypically German" (101, 96, 98),