

4-1-2001

Review of *Jena Romanticism and the Appropriation of Jakob Böhme* by Paola Mayer

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Mayer, Paola. *Jena Romanticism and Its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature*. McGill-Queen's Studies in the History of Ideas, no. 25. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999. Pp. x + 242. Cloth, \$65.00.

Paolo Mayer sets out to revise the accepted image of the influence of Jakob Böhme, the sixteenth-century mystic and theosophist, on the romantic poets and philosophers who congregated at Jena in the years 1798–1803. She convincingly argues that, except for the philosophers and critics Friedrich Schlegel and F. W. J. Schelling, Böhme's direct influence was negligible, more a matter of the self-proclaimed new religion of romanticism making ideological use of a controversial, in some sense subversive, forerunner in German literary history. In the hands of Ludwig Tieck, for instance, or Novalis, Böhme becomes a symbol of the new religion of *Poesie* and the hostile reception afforded by the orthodox evangelical pastors of his time becomes an allegory for the hostility that the new, "let it all hang out" aesthetic of romanticism encountered in the more classical and form-loving members of the literary culture. In Mayer's terms, Böhme's reception among the poets was hagiographic; he was the romantics' poster child.

Böhme lived from 1575 to 1624. The son of peasants, but by no means unlettered, the "mystic shoemaker of Görlitz" claimed the source of his teachings was direct divine revelation. He claimed to have visions in 1600 and 1610, whose content he translated into his unusually graphic writings, interspersed with Pietist attacks on reason and on outward religious observances. This unusual 'theology' blended themes that F. Schlegel and Schelling, at least, found attractive: (a) the idea of a self-generating or developmental God, (b) an approach to the problem of evil that logically seems to place responsibility on God, and (c) a large systematic role for desire and will, rather than reason, in the origin of the world and in human salvation. Notable also is the physicalism of Böhme's theology, and the assignment of a wrathful nature to God the Father. Böhme's reception in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, determined largely by a first biography written in 1652 by a disciple named von Furstenburg, was generally warm in pietist circles, cool in rationalist quarters, e.g., in that of Lessing and Leibniz.

The established story is that all the major romantic writers, poets as well as philosophers, were influenced through a direct study of Böhme's texts. Mayer takes issue with that, especially in the case of the poets Tieck and Novalis and the scientists J. W. Ritter. Though each of them writes glowingly of Böhme as a poet—in fact a persecuted poet, a near-martyr for the religion of *Poesie*—Mayer finds no sound evidence for a direct transmission, either of ideas or of terminology, from Böhme to these figures. What other literary critics have advanced as evidence is, she argues, a body of ideas and vocabulary common to the Neoplatonic, mystic tradition and to Christian thinking in general. If a stricter standard of proving "reception" than mere similarity of language is adopted, it seems that Tieck, Novalis, and Ritter had a slim acquaintance with Böhme's writings, but nonetheless advanced a hagiographic view of the "folk poet." Others among the Jena circle—Schleiermacher, A. W. Schlegel, Dorothea and Caroline Schlegel—took a skeptical view of this propagandistic ploy. Only the more philosophical minds, F. Schlegel and Schelling, read Böhme in any depth or ventured elaborate appropriations. Mayer argues that both these figures went

through an initial phase of enthusiasm for Böhme, to be later followed by personal reservations about him and, eventually, by public criticism from a philosophical or orthodox theological stance. Mayer obviously relishes the irony, in this case, of an initial idolization of Böhme as a representative of the 'new religion' of *Poesie*, followed later by that very figure serving as a stepping stone for F. Schlegel's and Schelling's return to traditional Christianity. Though she seems to argue her case well on historical and literary principles, Mayer shows little sympathy for the romantic program of melding science, religion, and literature into a new religion: *Poesie*. She tacitly conveys a sense that Schelling and F. Schlegel were on the right track in turning from romantic pantheism back to Christian theism, or, in the latter case, to Catholicism.

For this audience, it should be noted that the last third of the monograph is reserved for a close treatment of F. Schlegel's and Schelling's appropriation of Böhme's ideas and of their eventual discomfort with them. Her treatment of Schelling is generous, fair, and comprehensive. She writes that his early philosophy forms an extended conversation with contemporary and historical figures—Fichte and Spinoza, and in the background, Plato and the Neoplatonic traditions—but no particular, or named, interaction with Böhme. Though Schelling talks of finite individuals as "fallen from ideas" as earlier as 1804, it is not until 1806 that Schelling refers to Böhme even indirectly, and not until the 1809 *Essay on Human Freedom* that he directly appropriates the central Böhman idea of a "dark core" in God, that in God which is not God, which becomes nature and serves as the ground of humans' choice for good and evil. Schelling's purpose in this essay, however, is to use this dark ground as a foil for the emergence of a loving and personal God. Mayer rightly argues that Schelling's use of Böhme is always critical and distanced. Whereas Böhme construct both God and world from almost physical characteristics, e.g., bitterness, sharpness, light, Schelling transforms these things into abstract concepts, and, whereas Böhme depicted a real or historical development in God, Schelling makes this development logical, a positing of the self-enclosed ground as an "eternal past."

This study is brief, well-argued, and lucid in its presentation of evidence. Its discussion of what counts as evidence in the history of ideas is stimulating, if opinionated. For historians of philosophy who tacitly assume that philosophers talk to and are influenced only by other philosophers, it can be a broadening of horizons.

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Joseph Hamburger. *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999. Pp. xx + 239. Cloth, \$35.00.

C. L. Ten, editor. *Mill's Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy*. Aldershot: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1999. Pp. xxiii + 498. Cloth, \$180.00.

John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* is commonly viewed as the classic defense of individual liberty, and Mill himself taken as the grandfather of modern liberalism. In *John Stuart Mill on Liberty and Control* Joseph Hamburger seeks to dislodge this orthodox interpreta-