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Brüning, Gerrit. *Ungleiche Gleichgesinnte. Die Beziehung zwischen Goethe und Schiller 1794-1798*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015. 360 pp. €39.90 (hardcover).

Germany's image as 'one nation under Goethe', as Neil MacGregor has put it, has constantly invited criticism but never gone away. The image of Goethe's ten-year partnership with Schiller as the cornerstone of German literature has, similarly, by turns been cultivated and torn down since Goethe's publication of their correspondence in 1828-29 and his brief retrospective account of their friendship, *Glückliches Ereignis* (1817). Ernst Rietschel's double statue of the men, erected in front of the theatre in Weimar in 1857, captures visually the way in which the positive accounts of the relationship, including those by Schiller and Goethe themselves, have commonly cast it: a partnership of equals, complementary in their tendencies to the realm of idea(l)s and to worldly reality. Goethe, the shorter man in real life, was made the same height as Schiller and stands squarely on the ground, a hand on Schiller's shoulder, whilst Schiller gazes upwards. Senior in years and, for much of the two centuries since *Glückliches Ereignis*, superior in the public's mind, Goethe holds a laurel wreath, which Schiller – depending on one's view – is either reaching for, rejecting, or receiving from Goethe's other hand. Such an understanding has inevitably invited attack – on the classics' place and value in German culture in general, or more specifically, questioning the true extent of the two men's collaboration – and, in turn, defence.

Another book on the relationship between Goethe and Schiller would risk simply adding another cycle to the same debates, were it not for Gerrit Brüning's different approach: to bring to the discussion of the authors' mutual influence a close, critical and detailed study of their correspondence. This may not sound all that new: it has many smaller-scale precursors, and deep roots in the standard use of letters in scholarly editorial work and genetic criticism. This study stands out, however, for its scale and for the detail with which it establishes accurate accounts of key moments in Goethe and Schiller's collaboration, and it has been significantly catalysed by the new critical edition of Goethe and Schiller's correspondence (by Norbert Oellers and Georg Kurscheidt, 2009), as well as of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, one of the products of the collaboration (the new Volume 8 of the *Nationalausgabe*, also by Oellers, 2010). Brüning succeeds in breaking the image of the correspondence as a single, rounded work: an assumption that has been stubbornly resilient, in critical as well as affirmative accounts of the relationship, since the letters' compilation by Goethe. Brüning instead uses the letters for what they are, the products and reflections of momentary activities and changing circumstances. His detailed analysis of them, alongside other evidence of the genesis of selected works of the mid-1790s, results in an account of the partnership that aims to challenge the image on Rietschel's pedestal without pulling it down, by showing the points at which the collaboration was extensive as well as the projects on which it had little influence at all.

Brüning starts and finishes his book by taking issue with Goethe's claim in *Glückliches Ereignis* that he and Schiller had begun their relationship as 'Geistesantipoden'. Rather, Brüning points out, before 1794 Goethe had simply ignored Schiller more than he had disliked him; when they did begin to work together, they did so, logically enough, because of what they had in common. Brüning's reading of the correspondence, and his detailed attention to chronology, ought to put a definitive end to the tired myth that *Die Horen*, collaboration on which was the beginning of the partnership, was a project that Goethe privately supported to Schiller's face but tacitly undermined in the texts he contributed. The study traces Schiller's intense engagement with Goethe's writing of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and argues convincingly and at length that his comments were constructive, not carping; it makes new connections between Goethe's input and the final versions of *Wallenstein*, notably defining far more precisely the nature and impact of Goethe's suggestions about using astrology in the drama, which were previously well known in broader terms. On the authors' discussions of genre, which culminated in Goethe's essay *Über epische und dramatische Dichtung*, Brüning shows the importance of contextual precision for evaluating the correspondence, arguing that the essay is focused far more on Goethe's problematic (and at that point, failed) plans for the epic poems *Die Jagd* and *Achilleis* than on his simpler and successful epic *Hermann und Dorothea*. Goethe's *Faust*, on the other hand, he shows to have been little influenced by the correspondence with Schiller.

It might be argued that there is nothing new about a nuanced, critical approach to the correspondence as a whole and to the two authors' influence on each other's works specifically. Sensible scholarship has long recognised that *Glückliches Ereignis* is retrospective and of questionable value as a precise factual account, just as Eckermann's *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* should indeed be approached with healthy scepticism (112). Brüning quotes well-established scholars whose judgements have been sound. His recasting of complementary antipodes as 'ungleiche Gleichgesinnte' feels like hair-splitting, even though his attack on uncritical readings of Goethe's short essay is fair. As Brüning suggests, however, the surprise is not as much in his findings – though he does make important contributions on the genesis of *Wilhelm Meister* especially, and on *Wallenstein* – as in the fact that new scholarship still ignores the evidence from which he and others have worked. He rightly and repeatedly takes scholars to task where their methods have been speculative or sloppy.

Caricatures that exaggerate the two men's differences at the beginning of the friendship in order to draw a simple picture of unbroken collaboration thereafter, or that, by total contrast, look for ill-disguised differences between them at every turn, have proved lastingly convenient. Brüning's analysis will prove indispensable on the genesis of the works discussed; in more general terms it offers a persuasive account of how both the makers and slayers of German literary myth have been oddly and persistently reluctant to let detail get in the way of a good story.

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