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978-0-521-28673-2 - The French Romantics, Volume 1

Edited by D. G. Charlton

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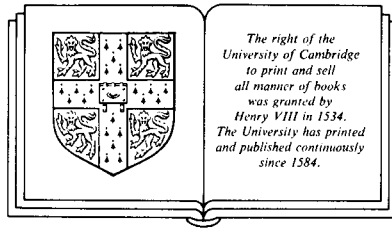
The French Romantics

VOLUME 1

edited by

D.G. CHARLTON

Professor of French in the University of Warwick



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge
London New York New Rochelle
Melbourne Sydney

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521286732

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First published 1984
Re-issued in this digitally printed version 2009

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 83-21010

ISBN 978-0-521-24413-8 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-28673-2 Paperback

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Preface

This work aims to describe and evaluate the collective achievements of the French Romantics and to reassess, some 150 years after their heyday and in the light of recently increasing scholarly attention, their significance and persisting value. To that end certain delimitations have been adopted, in part for reasons advanced in the introductory chapter. First, this is not a study of Romanticism and tries to eschew definitions of that much-defined abstraction; secondly, it seeks to examine the 'French Romantic movement' in itself, to the extent to which that is possible – in isolation from European Romanticism as a multi-national phenomenon and in isolation also from the numerous other developments within French culture during what has sometimes been rather over-inclusively termed 'the age of Romanticism'. The purpose, by contrast, is to focus upon the works of the French Romantics themselves and the movement they cumulatively created, and here a presupposition must be stated that explains the very design of the work (a view for which the editor alone is responsible, even though his collaborators may share it to a greater or lesser extent). This is that they and their movement have to be interpreted not only in the perspectives of literary history and criticism, as has quite often been the case in even the best and most helpful of previous studies, but, equally and much more broadly, of intellectual and cultural history in general. The Romantics' salons and *cénacles* included historians, painters and illustrators, men of politics, composers, critics and philosophers alongside poets, novelists and dramatists, and, furthermore, even the literary men themselves had far wider preoccupations than we today tend to connect with 'literature'. They lived at a time when works from Mme de Staël's *De la littérature* (1800) to surveys like Alfred Nettement's histories of French literature under the Restoration and under the July monarchy (1852 and 1854) commonly included under that term works of history, philosophy, even religious thought, as much as poems, novels and plays, and the Romantics themselves fully shared that range of interests, as the sheer diversity of their works readily illustrates.

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As a consequence, this study of them contains chapters on the visual arts, music and opera, historians, religious and political thought, and criticism and theory, as well as on the main literary genres, and that in turn has entailed a practical conclusion. The present editor, at any rate, could not single-handedly write such a book (as kindly suggested by the Cambridge University Press initially); only a collaborative study, enriched by a variety of specialists, could hope to be adequate. I am most grateful to the distinguished scholars who accepted my invitations and pleased that, whilst most of them are by design British or American, the very considerable renewal of scholarly work on the Romantics in France is represented here by the chapters from Professors Fayolle and Milner. Another advantage may result: instead of a single, inevitably limited, interpretation the reader is offered several. The resulting differences of emphasis and judgment, the ‘variations on a theme’ played by my colleagues, will, I hope, make the total examination the more comprehensive and stimulating, not least where conflicting assessments are evident. We have not even sought complete agreement, indeed, as to *who* ‘the French Romantics’ *are* (a multi-sided problem discussed in chapter 1), and each contributor is finally responsible for the *dramatis personae* of his own chapter, whatever pragmatic guide-lines the editor may have suggested. It may be tempting to appeal to Henri Bremond’s well-known half-truth, salutary though it is for those seeking portable generalisations: ‘Il y a autant de romantismes que de Romantiques.’ Against that, my colleagues and I are agreed that there did exist, in the first half of the nineteenth century, a ‘French Romantic movement’ – slow though most of its rather loosely linked members were to become conscious of it and diverse as was their commitment in both duration and conviction. Our attempt is to reconsider it, but without ever attributing as much interest to the movement itself – finally an abstraction – as to individuals; the title, *The French Romantics (sic)*, says what is intended.

The ordering of the following chapters is in good measure arbitrary, reflecting the claim that no aspect or genre has significant priority over any other, and so also is the division between the two volumes required by present publishing economics. Only the first chapter, surveying the movement as a whole and its rise, development and aims, fell naturally into place, and as well, to conclude, on chronological grounds, Professor Milner’s chapter, which presents a final group of writers whom he describes as essentially ‘les romantiques *marginaux*’, translated here, with allusion to ‘fringe theatre’ and the like, as ‘Romantics on the Fringe’. The chapters between have been re-ordered to the last, until choice became unavoidable. Chapter 1 is followed by two com-

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plementary chapters (II and III) on different aspects of what, in my view, was a fundamental intellectual commitment on the part of the French Romantics (whatever be true of their English, German and other counterparts), an intended *engagement* of which a recognition is basic for a full understanding of their concerns and works. Thereafter the literary genres are studied in turn: poetry (IV), prose fiction (V), drama (VI), literary criticism and theory (VII), and – seen as ‘literature’ by Nettement but perhaps not by Professor Johnson and other modern scholars – the work of the Romantic historians (VIII). (As to the specific ordering here a minor consideration should be mentioned; since the three chapters written by myself rest on a particular interpretation – which my colleagues may or may not share, though I naturally hope they do in good part – it seemed easier for the reader to judge it if they were placed in the same volume.) Chapters IX and X consider the other cultural forms prized by the Romantics as part of their belief in ‘la fraternité des arts’: the visual arts, and music and opera. Chapter XI, on the ‘fringe’ Romantics, completes the work, to which by intention there is no formal Conclusion. The current profusion of scholarly work on the Romantics, in France and abroad, would make conclusions more than normally premature at this time; secondly, any editor would be presumptuous, not to add hard-pressed, to attempt an agreed communiqué from his diverse colleagues. The worth-while conclusion, moreover, is really that the reader should eventually put aside this work and repair to the bookshelves, the concert halls and the art galleries. To help him to do so the more rewardingly, however, each chapter ends with a bibliographical essay, albeit firmly selective and biased in part to studies in English. Notes have been kept to the minimum needed, in the view of each separate contributor, in order, where thought desirable, to identify the sources referred to.

I feel greatly indebted to my fellow authors, and, for his frequent encouragement and advice, to Professor Garnet Rees, and equally so to the Syndics and to the Publisher and his colleagues at the Cambridge University Press; they have been especially generous, particularly in the present financial climate, in the length they themselves suggested, in agreeing to translation of chapters VII and XI from the original French and to the inclusion of illustrations, contained in the second volume, for chapters VI, IX and X, and in their constant helpfulness during the process of preparation and publication.

University of Warwick
January 1983

D.G.C.

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Acknowledgments

The editor records acknowledgments from Professor J.C. Ireson to the British Academy for research grants which assisted the preparation of chapter IV, 'Poetry'.

Note

The place of publication of works cited is Paris unless otherwise stated.