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Youth – a romantic concept?

Introduction

Research has contended youth is an „invention“ of the 18th century¹. This thesis does not contest the fact that youth was already known and accepted as a stage in life even earlier. Certain basic anthropological patterns of youthfulness, for example nonchalance, instability, recklessness, exaggeration, bashfulness looking forward to the future and the ability to make friends have been rhetorically implied, repeated and cited² as a matter of course since the time of Aristoteles. The pointed thesis that the concept of youth only arose in the 18th century accentuates that youth as an autonomous way of life is a characteristic of the Modern Age.

The stage of life called „youth“ developed as a relatively autonomous status in Western Europe in a society which changed from the static to the dynamic: or, in terms of systems theory, from a society characterized by stratification to one differentiated by function. The „liberation“ from the father's power as head of the family³ can only be achieved by an abrupt change from a position of service to one of control, as long as the period of youth is characterised in the old European society by power and dependence, and this means by the general recognition of standards and rules of the adult world, both in courtly and feudal society. On the other hand, the more an attitude in life based on examples and rules from the past becomes obsolete in a modern society characterised by accelerated changes, the more the older generation loses competency, the more the relevance of their standards and rules drops with the diminishing ability to be applied. The orientation of modern society towards the future places a higher value on the former deficiencies of youth, their lack of experience, their instability, the vagueness of their hopes and their reckless audacity. The turn of historical times, the recasting from the past to the future, the increase in expectation and the reduction of experience, all transform youths' deficiencies into hope and potential. The relative lack of responsibility in the society, the liberation from direct practical relationships in life as a consequence of longer training now converts youth into a coveted status.

¹ Lutz Roth: *Erfindung der Jugendlichen*. München 1993.

² Aristoteles: *Rhetorik*. Paderborn 1959. S. 139.

³ John R. Gillis: *Geschichte der Jugend*. Weinheim 1980.

This generalising statement is certainly subject to limitation. Youth as an autonomous, productive period in life has not only been reserved for specific levels of middle-class youths and of aristocrats who have become middle class⁴. It is also predominately ascribed only to young male persons. The pedagogue Joachim Heinrich Campe does indeed try to free the young women of the „blissfull“ middle class from the hitherto normal „tied to the apron strings“ way of life⁵. Although Ernst Moritz Arndt ascribes „stubbornness“ not only to boys but also to girls⁶, the orientation of the daughter towards two principles remains predominant: towards marriage with a husband who will guide her and towards „motherliness“ as appropriate to women's „childishness“⁷. The obvious future subordination of the woman to the control of the man certainly does not permit the emergence of a period of time comparable to a young man's „years of loutishness“ or „years of being a rascal“⁸. Young women are conceded at the most a „minute of fluttering before the long years of seriousness“ (as Jean Paul accurately puts it)⁹. While one finds it not difficult to sketch the gradually widening period of time for the male youth during the course of the 18th century, the hopeful „young gentlemen“ of the Enlightenment, the protesting stripling of the Sturm und Drang and the ironic self-reflecting young man of the Romantic Period, one will find it difficult to discern a comparable development for young women. In spite of all the stretching of limits and license that was accorded to a young woman in the Romantic Period, at least fictitiously and programmatically, orientation towards the world of children and nature still remains predominant. The character of Sophie Mereau as presented by Clemens Brentano can be considered to be representative: „She makes everything healthy and blooming, she is the perpetual youth and always a child...“¹⁰

The interplay between youths and adults in a society determined by accelerated changes becomes further complicated because of another component – childhood. Not only a new quality of youth was discovered during the 18th century, but also of childhood. The history of language and terminology seismologically reflects the process of dissociation and precision. Right into the 16th century the term „child included also the stripling, young man, the virgin, without reference to older people“ and conversely the term „young“ was used „for per-

⁴ Vgl. Walter Hornstein: Vom „Jungen Herrn“ zum „Hoffnungsvollen Jüngling“. Heidelberg 1965.

⁵ Joachim Heinrich Campe: Vaeterlicher Rath für meine Tochter. Ein Gegenstück zum Theophron, Braunschweig 1789, S. VII and S. IV.

⁶ Ernst Moritz Arndt: Fragmente der Menschenbildung. Altona 1805. S. 113 ff.

⁷ Vgl. die informative Einleitung zu Mädchenliteratur. Vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg. Hrsg. von Gisela Wilkending. Stuttgart 1994, S. 14.

⁸ Arndt. (Anm. 6) S. 193.

⁹ Jean Paul: Levana oder Erziehlehre. In: Jean Paul, Werke, Hrsg. von Norbert Miller, Bd. 5. Darmstadt 1963, S. 722.

¹⁰ Nach Dagmar von Gersdorff: Dich zu lieben kann ich nicht verlernen. Das Leben der Sophie Brentano-Mereau. Frankfurt a.M. 1990, S. 325.

sons who are in childhood or are not yet completely adult“. Only at the end of the 18th century youth is terminologically specified and limited to a period in life „from twelve to seventeen, eighteen years“¹¹.

Childhood and youth clearly defined themselves from now onwards by referring to each other. Childhood had mutated into a pure, genuine, untouched state, while youth had become a dilemma and two-sided. Youth could be celebrated on the one hand with a view towards the adult world as free and uncommitted, the model of childhood on the other hand caused youth to seem more and more endangered and subject to crises. The young person is accordingly „unable to defend himself against his own passions“, „a ship without a pilot and rigging“.¹² The endangerments of youth are a permanent topic in pedagogics. Joachim Heinrich Campe saw youth in an allegorical picture as an „impenetrable labyrinth“ with „tempting stony paths“.¹³ Literature and pedagogics have been competing with each other since Rousseau, this „master architect of youth“¹⁴, for an aesthetic model of the self and for reasonable social crisis management for youth. Let us take another look at the old European society first of all and at its view of „socially disadvantaged serving“ youths in order to historically follow the change that took place, namely the recasting and reorientation of society from old to young.

The first indication of a new estimation of being young can be seen on the one hand in the obliviousness to the problem of growing old at the courts of the Ancien Régime and on the other hand in the „systematic forcing of puberty“ in the galant age.¹⁵ Even the eternally young heroes and gods are rejuvenated in pictures and sculptures. The mature, bearded figures of Jupiter, Neptune or Pluto preferred in the Baroque transform around the *Sattelzeit* (1750's) into classical, handsome, contemplative young men. In the wake of Winckelmann, Goethe formulated the perennial intention of „drawing attention to the splendour of exterior human nature in youthful bodies, because where else can one find the summit of art than in the full bloom of a creation made in the image of God.“¹⁶ It is quite apparent that the cult of youth and the aesthetic cult combine here. The classical cult of the young body does indeed conform to the tendencies of the time in all the specific details. Even Don Quixote had to put up with being changed into a young person. He roams as the enraptured „Don

¹¹ Rainer Wild: Kind, Kindheit und Jugend. Hinweise zum begriffsgeschichtlichen Wandel im letzten Drittel des 18. Jahrhunderts. In: Juventa, 4. Beiheft 1993, S. 9-16.

¹² Aleida Assmann: Werden was wir waren. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte der Kindheitsidee. In: Antike und Abendland 24 (1978), S. 111.

¹³ Campe (Anm 5), Vorrede.

¹⁴ Frank Musgrove. Youth and the Social Order. London. 2. Aufl. 1968, Zit. nach: Michael Mitterauer: Sozialgeschichte der Jugend. Frankfurt a. M. 1986, S. 34.

¹⁵ Eduard Fuchs: Illustrierte Sittengeschichte vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart. Die galante Zeit, Bd. 2. München 1910, S. 273.

¹⁶ Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Tag- und Jahreshefte. In: Sämtliche Werke. Hrsg. von Irmtraud Schmidt. Bd. 17. Frankfurt a.M. 1994, S. 93f.

Sylvio' through the countryside. Christ as a young man with reference to Ephesus 4.13 serves as the role model in various movements of religious awakening in the 18th century, especially in Pietism. Referring back to Meister Eckhart, „being young“ is no longer understood to be a state and possession, but rather a process of becoming, a process of rejuvenation.¹⁷ The relationship between a Christological image of youth, a corresponding religious experience of awakening and renewal, the classical ideal of youth and beauty and the Rousseauesque concept of a second post-pubertal birth have apparently still not been researched.¹⁸

A profound reorientation of society from old to young corresponds to the aesthetic, literary and theological cult of youth. The honourable old man is no longer a role model, it is seldom the active experienced adult, but more and more it is the young person. An indication and also a driving force of the reorientation from old to young could be that the writers were becoming younger, an observation which Christian Fürchtegott Gellert countered with great scepticism.¹⁹ The change of orientation in the arts is apparent. The traditional poeta doctus is replaced by the youthful, impetuous genius who sets rules for himself. Male and female authors who become constantly younger, increasingly and resolutely use their youth as a topic for their writing. Achim von Arnim lauds Clemens Brentano's romantic novel *Godwi*, „Only you have been successful in presenting Godwi as a young poet to be. From this point of view it is of the most perfect poetry that I know.“²⁰ The focus of discourse links between youth and aesthetics changed from Classicism to the Romantic Period. Where it was then the appearance of youth and physical beauty, it has now become the connection between the artistic world and youth self-stylisation. Again one needs to distinguish male and female authors. Female writers for some length of time tended to treat their youth as a topic in the genre of literature for advising young girls. Authors such as Sophie Mereau or Dorothea Schlegel projected their own wishes for a life in youthful freedom not infrequently onto young male heroes. Bettine von Arnim was a widow when she could finally visualize her youth during the *Vormärz* in literary terms by writing: „I know what youth is: heartfelt, undistracted perception of the self.“²¹

As much as youth has to be differentiated in Classicism, Pietism and Sturm und Drang on one hand and in the romantic youth movement on the other hand, one basic feature remains in common: youth is from now on no longer a time of

¹⁷ Ernst Benz: Die ewige Jugend in der christlichen Mystik von Meister Eckhart bis Schleiermacher. In Ders.: Urbild und Abbild. Der Mensch und die mythische Welt. Leiden 1974.

¹⁸ Vgl. Die Hinweise von Mitterauer (Anm. 14) S. 35.

¹⁹ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert: Moralische Vorlesungen (1771). In: Ch. F.G.: Gesammelte Schriften. Hrsg. von Bernd Witte, Bd. VI. Berlin 1992, S. 279.

²⁰ In: Ernst Beutler: Briefe aus dem Brentanokreis. In: Jb. d. Deutschen Hochstifts (1934/1935), S. 402.

²¹ Bettine von Arnim: Clemens Brentanos Frühlingskranz. Frankfurt a. M. 1985, S. 310.

transition from an incomplete to a complete status of adulthood. It is now the genuine and socially sanctioned period of time for the development of subjectivity, for its crises and risks. Youth accommodates the acceleration of changes in the Modern Age in so far as it is associated with innovation. Youth is more and more clearly identified with the future during the course of modernisation and its futurising of time. That which was reserved only for a small stratum around 1770 becomes general after 1800. It is precisely the 63-year-old Goethe who has this experience. His petition to save his son from military duty was denied by his former companion in youth, Duke Karl August von Weimar with the memorable dictum: „one shall see later, where his own will shall take him (Goethe's son; G. Oe), since the first law of the present revolution states that young people be left to their own will.“²²

The process of youth being made autonomous clearly impinges against society's reservation to radical change. The tendency of identifying youth and future with each as a political omen is part of the programme in the formulations of the romantic agitator Joseph Görres. He writes on 12.2.1813, at the time of the Wars of Independence:

Ich erwarte, wie Sie, wenig von dem lebenden Geschlechte; desto mehr von dem heranwachsenden Theile desselben. Auch wird der Kampf immer lauter und die Furcht der Alten beweist, wie die Kraft, so die Reinheit der Jugend. Die Erscheinungen, welche die Zukunft des Vaterlandes andeuten, sind ein erhebender Führer durch seine matte Gegenwart.²³

The explosiveness of this written statement on the potential of youth is documented by the Prussian authorities in the order from Hardenberg that the recipient of the letter shall be asked about the meaning of these words. Görres could have answered this request in historical-philosophical terms: he could have demonstrated the necessity of „letting time begin again and of giving the world a new youth“.²⁴ A new time and a new youth are however not established by any single act of change. The arising sociology pragmatically formulates the increasing polarisation between the generations into the projected secular tension between change and conservation, revolution and restoration. It sees a guarantee for the „possibility of social and cultural changes (...) in the addition of constantly effective differences of outlook between generations competing with each other“.²⁵ Providing there is a dynamic, mobile society that is open towards the future, youth is accepted from now onwards as a way of life containing conflict and avantgarde elements and is granted a license by society for innovation and in-

²² Friedrich Sengle: *Das Genie und sein Fürst*. Stuttgart 1993, S. 302. Vgl. Manfred Agethan: *Geheimbund und Utopie*. München 1987, S. 156.

²³ Justus von Gruver: Ein Beitrag zum Briefwechsel von Joseph von Görres. In: *Deutsche Revue* (1893), S. 368.

²⁴ Vgl. Manfred Agethan: *Geheimbund und Utopie*. München 1987, S. 156.

²⁵ Vgl. Hans Jaeger: *Generationen in der Geschichte. Überlegungen zu einer umstrittenen Konzeption*. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 3. Jg. (1977), S. 240.

fringement of conventions. Many of the writers of the Romantic Period, especially Achim von Arnim and Joseph von Eichendorff, interpret the period of being a student as a space within which plans for life and the future can be tried out, not only in the individual interest. Life as a student in a community of generations without difference in status or rank, well removed from „everyday conventions“ shall „develop their self-image according to the social model of a future national society in Germany“.²⁶

A history of youth in the 18th century can be written from two perspectives: on the one hand as the programmatic history of the self image of youth in literature and art together with its fictionalisation, and on the other hand as the consequence of perpetual efforts from the parent generation to integrate and model youth. The concept of youth is determined by the tense complement between both the programmatic self-assertion of youth in the literary self-model and an education less natural more reflective and which proceeds methodically and is aware of institutions; it is determined by youths' transgressions of self and reality in the medium of literature which takes place either in the spheres of desire, dream and fantasy or in a wonderful, futuristic interior and exterior world and it is determined by youths' reattachment to and integration into society which is controlled institutionally and methodically by means of pedagogics. This is first the case in the Romantic Period. The option of youth being the potential for renewal in society leads consequently to youth becoming the preferred object of various rivalising methods of education. Nevertheless the most open minded pedagogics are themselves in a dilemma with respect to the respective new generation. The fact that youth protests not only against pedagogic attempts at domestication and integration, but also tends to withdraw from being an object of education belongs to the concept of youth in the Modern Age. Youth is first youth in the modern sense when it becomes a topic itself and understands itself to be autonomous when distanced from the educational efforts of adults. Fictional literature is the preferred place and the favoured medium for treating itself as a topic and for asserting itself since the middle of the 18th century. Jean Paul writes in his *Selbererlebensbeschreibung*:

Noch besser als alle Aufgaben sind vielleicht gar keine; der Jüngling dürfe sich selber jedesmal die Materie wie eine Geliebte auslesen, für welche er warm und voll ist und mit der allein er das Lebendige zu erzeugen vermag. Lasset doch den jungen Geist nur auf einige Stunden und Bogen lang frei (...), damit er von euren Händen ungestört austöne.²⁷

Jean Paul's recommendation reveals the erotic connotation of the youthful relationship to the self in reading and writing. Pedagogic literature for children and youths tries to counter with „that which is reasonable“. Eichendorff's autobio-

²⁶ Wolfgang Frühwald: Repräsentation der Romantik. Zum Einfluß Achim von Arnims auf Leben und Werk Joseph von Eichendorffs. In: *Aurora* 46 (1986), S. 7.

²⁷ Jean Paul: *Selbererlebensbeschreibung*. In: J.P. Werke, Hrsg. von Norbert Miller. Bd. 6. Darmstadt 1963, S. 1094.

graphical report on the confiscation of his self-selection of favourite books by the pedagogue and their replacement with Campe's children's library is clearly not an isolated case.²⁸

Pedagogy and fictional literature compete with each other as alternative media for reflection and socialisation of youth: they are poetical and create fiction on one hand and are pedagogic and curb fiction on the other hand.²⁹ In a fragment of a novel which is autobiographically tinted, Luise Büchner uses the education of her brother George to reveal a literary division of work in the socialisation of male youth in the educated classes of the 19th century. The morning is characterised by formal teaching in rhetoric and practical matters taught in a paternalistic manner. The afternoon, however, is reserved for the cultivated reading of romantic literature with the mother: this becomes a period of time for intimacy and familiarity.³⁰ Poetry as an excellent medium for shaping the self in youth places the powers of imagination at the centre of the concept of youth. This is looked on suspiciously by pedagogics. While Johann Gottfried Herder believed that he had to warn about the dangers of powers of imagination, this „most volatile of all powers of human disposition“,³¹ Friedrich Schlegel asserted that the „basic force in youth“ was fantasy.³² Poetry opens up an ever increasing importance for the imaginary in the socialisation of youth. However the dangers also grow at the same time. Jean Paul talks perceptively of „reading matter“ as an „institute for education and distortion“.³³

Poetry creates an imaginary stage for self-creation and self-search amongst young people. It allows the most varied of transgressive experiences of subjectivity to take place. Under conditions of reason which excludes or at least contains the imagination, it allows „adolescent journeys of initiation“ outside the control of pedagogic institutions.³⁴ Poetic language allows the reader and the writer to live out early childhood methods of expression ranging from onomatopoeia to the grotesque subversive and arabesque anarchist expressions.³⁵ The ability of poetic language in the Romantic Period to open up „an intermediate field between the subjectivity of empirical subjects and the conceptual transcen-

²⁸ Joseph von Eichendorff: *Ahnung und Gegenwart*. Stuttgart 1994, S. 53f.

²⁹ Vgl. Rüdiger Steinlein: *Die domestizierte Phantasie. Studien zur Kinderliteratur, Kinderlektüre und Literaturpädagogik des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts*. Heidelberg 1987.

³⁰ Luise Büchner: *Ein Dichter. Novellenfragment*. Hrsg. von Anton Büchner. Darmstadt 1965.

³¹ Johann Gottfried Herder: *Vorrede zu den `Palmbliättern` (1786)*. In: *Sämtliche Werke*. Hrsg. von Bernhard Suphan. Bd. 16. Berlin 1887, S. 584.

³² Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schlegel: *Monologen*. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Bd. 12. Berlin 1995, S. 384ff.

³³ Jean Paul (Anm. 27), S. 1051.

³⁴ Hartmut Böhme: *Romantische Adoleszenzkrisen. Zur Psychodynamik der Venuskult-Novellen von Tieck, Eichendorff und E.T.A. Hoffmann*. In: *Text und Kontext. Sonderreihe* Bd. 10. *Literatur und Psychoanalyse*. Kopenhagen/München 1981, S. 133ff.

³⁵ Vgl. Friedrich A. Kittler: *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900*. München 1985.

dental subjectivity of philosophy“ is emphasized.³⁶ The first literary youth movement of the Sturm und Drang differs from the second romantic youth movement by reason of a pact between poetry and transcendental philosophy. The young writers of the Romantic Period no longer protest against the conventions of an older generation. They believe that they have a theory at their disposal, a self-reflection of modern times, so that they can fight a crusade „against modern times“ with „absolute polemics“.³⁷ The romantic writers at the universities of Jena, Heidelberg, Göttingen and Landshut developed a fissured, symphilosophising internal group conduct and a radical polemic external conduct from this approach. That which first appeared to the contemporaries only as literary rebellion is conceived right from the very beginning as a basic change in the style of life, indeed as a renewal of society. This intention emerges openly into the light of day with the politicizing of youth during the Wars of Independence. A collective youthful „feeling for life“ that tendentially spread over the classes starts to come into prominence. With a view to the generation of 1830, Hofmannsthal writes: „and for a moment the epoch, not individuals, the few, seemed to glow with the fire of the youth.“³⁸ In his treatise, *Die Jugend vor fünfundzwanzig Jahren*, Karl Immermann believed in a similar way that a global sense of time and being young could be noticed in the War of Independence. For the first time in German history „youth (...) formally as youth“ had suffered and had taken action.³⁹ „The mood of youth (...) had been touched and youthful motives had been set into motion“ in the Wars of Independence.⁴⁰

However quite apart from the sympathy for the youthful ethos, Immermann stresses the related ambivalence, the tendency to „build up and destruct“⁴¹ coming to the surface. The generations before and after the March Revolution of 1848 will be even more decisive in criticising the romantic concept as a fatal pact between the imagination and literature in the age of Realism. The autobiographies of Georg Gottfried Gervinus or Karl Rosenkranz, for example, bear witness to a loss of narcissism in the Jean Paulian sense, which they themselves had lived as youths.⁴² The romantic identification of youth and poetry is still a target for criticism for Fontane in 1850. Fontane proposes the theory that „if anything

³⁶ Vgl. Gabriele Schwab: *Entgrenzungen und Entgrenzungsmythen. Zur Subjektivität im modernen Roman*. Stuttgart 1987, S. 17.

³⁷ Friedrich Schlegel: *Kritische Ausgabe*. Hrsg. von Ernst Behler. Bd. 18. Paderborn 1963, S. 80.

³⁸ Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Versuch über Victor Hugo*. In: H. v. H.: *Prosa 1*. Frankfurt a. M. 1950, S. 391.

³⁹ Karl Immermann: *Die Jugend vor fünfundzwanzig Jahren*. In: K.I.: *Werke*. Hrsg. von Benno von Wiese. Bd. 4. Düsseldorf 1973, S. 36.

⁴⁰ Ebd.

⁴¹ Ebd.

⁴² Georg Gottfried Gervinus. *Leben. Von ihm selbst* (1860). Leipzig 1893, S. 86f. Karl Rosenkranz: *Von Magdeburg bis Königsberg*. Berlin 1873.

has played a participating role“ to „drag down our modern poetry“ it was the „fundamentally false assumption“ that „writing poetry is matter for youth“:

Inhaltsleer liegen die zwanzig Jahre eines Alltagslebens hinter dem Jüngling; er hat den Drang oder doch den Wunsch zu dichten und – keinen Stoff dafür. Er will von Liebe singen, aber er hat noch nicht wahrhaftig geliebt; er will schildern und beschreiben, aber er hat nichts gesehen; er will in Sprüchen die Rätsel des Lebens lösen, aber er hat nicht gelebt. Was bleibt ihm übrig? Er muß lügen oder sich mit fremden Federn schmücken. Unwahrheit und Phrase, Hand in Hand, schreiten einher; sie tragen beschriebene Zettel im Munde, drauf steht: ‚Wir sind Gedichte‘; sonst wüßten wir’s nicht.⁴³

The problems associated with the romantic attempt „to make the closest connection between fantasy and life as it really is“, as it is put in the introduction to Tieck’s *Phantasmus*, did not remain inaccessible to the Romantics themselves.⁴⁴ Clemens Brentano reports that he „secretly“ read Tasso’s *Das befreite Jerusalem* as an eight-year-old boy – a book which established in himself „a profound serious, indestructible basis“ and which „opened up a lot of corrupting passion.“⁴⁵ Socialisation fed by literature and imagination has been subject to not only permanent, external pedagogic and philosophic criticism since the appearance of Goethe’s *Leiden des jungen Werthers*. (It is known that Hegel dates the beginning of the „period of illness“, with the appearance of *Werther*). The danger in life from the models of imagination, desire and feelings in poetry is itself a topic in literature of the Romantic Period. Above all Ludwig Tieck’s work has permanently influenced Goethe’s dictum in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* on the necessary „disorientations“ of whole periods in life.⁴⁶

Unlike than in the *Vormärz* period and Realism the intensive poetic attempt to come to terms with the problem of youth in the poetry of the late Romantic Period can be seen as an attempt to maintain the romantic concept of youth. The involved representation of the powers of youthful imagination in sociably questionable directions in the writings of Jean Paul, Ludwig Tieck, Joseph von Eichendorff and E.T.A. Hoffmann, the insistence on the individual’s own aggressive literary youth (for example in the preface to the second edition of Tieck’s *William Lovell*), the circumspect consideration of the period of grace that youth has relative to the adults’ duty to make decisions (without attacking the latter as being philistine, as in Tieck’s novella *Der Tischlermeister*, for example), all these points illustrate the attempt to minimise the damage of a literary autonomy in

⁴³ Theodor Fontane: Christian Friedrich Scherenberg. In: T.F.: Sämtliche Werke. Bd. 21.1. München 1963, S. 53f.

⁴⁴ Ludwig Tieck: *Phantasmus*. Einleitung, In: L.T.: Schriften: Hrsg. von Manfred Frank. Bd. 6. Frankfurt a.M. 1985, S. 24.

⁴⁵ Vgl. Ulrich Profitlich: Risiken der Romanlektüre als Romanthema. Zu Jean Pauls ‚Titan‘. In: *Leser und Lesen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Heidelberg 1977, S. 76f.

⁴⁶ Rolf Schröder: *Novelle und Novellentheorien in der frühen Biedermeierzeit*. Tübingen 1970, S. 29.

youth by reattaching it to social living conditions and accordingly saving the romantic project. There are two strategies in the late Romantic Period: the competition between poetry and pedagogics was to be defused by romantic poetry adapting and changing into a form of progressive readiness for educational content. The opening of poetry for social experience was to be created by exchanging a fixation on youth as a stage in life with an option for „the youthfulness of people“⁴⁷, as Friedrich Schleiermacher had demonstrated in an exemplary manner in his *Theorie der Geselligkeit*.⁴⁸

The previous thirteen contributions historically discuss the concept of „youth“ from the Sturm und Drang up to the end of the 19th century. Points of view from cultural anthropology, the history of mentalities and ideas – all relating to the romantic model of youth – are combined with questions of narratology, aesthetics and discourse theory.

Both articles opening the anthology, those of *Hans-Heino Ewers* and *Alexander von Bormann*, add contours to the differences between the romantic and the pre-romantic concept of „youth“. Both authors are unanimous in underlining that the young people of 1790 saw themselves as being confronted with a traditional, emotional model of youth that was under question. In contrast to this the new concept of youth is characterized by susceptibility, reflexivity and metaphor. Unlike the rationalistic Enlightenment, the integration of excluded areas of the imagination is possible – according to *Ewers*'s argumentation – since the Romantics favoured the bond with childhood. The inclusion of childhood into the concept of youth enables the Modern to be reconciled with the Pre-modern; it turns into Restoration if childhood is dominant and the progressive future orientation of youth turns rigid and freezes. This observation enables *Ewers* to come to the conclusion that the Romantic Period acquired a doubled, indeed conflicting meaning within the history of youth and its relationship to the Modern. The ambiguity of the romantic experiment is also the emphasis of the article from *Alexander von Bormann*. Their critical distance from the pre-romantic model of youth enables the Romantics to expose an aesthetic core in youth. Youth is accordingly less an anthropological greatness but more importantly a radical fiction, a semiotic discovery. The fact that youth became reflective in the Romantic Period could be used as an opportunity, but has a hidden danger. Understanding youth as a poetic principle could equally favour the indeterminate, the incomplete and that which is open in poetry and life, but could also quite easily lead to the radical undoing of being young in youth.

Heinz Brüggemann's study analyses the problems of a romantic symbiosis between poetry and life that is obligatory for youth. The experiment of youth is indeed intimately connected with the project of the Modern, but has also been

⁴⁷ Vgl. „Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit“. In: *Der Mythos der Jugend*. Hrsg. von Thomas Kobner, Rolf-Peter Janz und Frank Frommler, Frankfurt a.M. 1985.

⁴⁸ Vgl. Art. *Geselligkeit*. In: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 3. Hrsg. von Joachim Ritter. Basel 1974, S. 457.

understood at least since the Romantic Period as a literary objection against the exclusively economic, rationalising Modern. Youth was given custody of an exceptional perception in the Romantic Period which developed in the encounter of nature and in poetry and which tried to expand into and apply itself to life experience. A concept of youth charged with so much poetry and auric perception can turn into a problem, however, if its threshold character – in other words its local and temporary licence – is overlooked and it is built up to a heterotopy and heterochrony that opposes the whole society. In his late work, Tieck developed in an ironic narrative manner what he formerly practised himself, the romantic hybris of transferring an aesthetic perception to a state of being and demonstrated in this literary presentation the late romantic fading expectations of the diagnostic power of literature and of a literary inspired subjectivity.

Both of *Gerhard Neumann's* articles extend and develop the analysis of the romantic project of a socialisation born out of poetry, by drawing attention to the importance of gender differences as a „dialogue of fantasies“. *Neumann's* analysis proceeds from the striking peculiarity that the romantic narrator initiates the socialisation dreams of women, be it by coaxing these dreams out of the characters using memory or by interpretatively evoking myths or even by usurping them by means of power. This is not only the scenario of an initiation and the complicated process of education in an adolescent woman, but rather the realization that the narrative enfolding of a woman's dream offers a medium by which the man is able to penetrate into the previous history of her soul and can therefore discover the origin of his desire also. The narrative communication game between man and woman does not necessarily have the respective gender identities as an objective. *Neumann's* second essay places emphasis on the fact that the romantic search for the origin of desire does not necessarily have to have the mutually fixed gender identities as an objective, but can also produce scintillating iridescent helpers for socialisation, who can take up in a protean manner the most varied of roles as „trickster“, either as producer of the initiation, as therapist, as mirror, as narrator or as an „author of literature“.

Gabriele Brandstetter's study occupies itself with the dilemma of how the narratively presented awakening of a young person from girlhood into womanhood can be transferred to another medium subject to different rules, namely ballet. The premises of courtly ballet demand a prima ballerina of the highest perfection and do not permit the representation of behaviour which for youth remains in the pre-position of the „imperfect“. The study analyses the break with tradition and the transpositions that would be necessary toward the end of the 19th century to allow another concept of the body from the point of view of the history of mentalities and to put this concept into practice aesthetically.

Barbara Hahn's thesis especially gains importance, in front of the background of *Neumann's* discussions of the personal interest of the man to narratively track down the origin of female desire. The subject matter of youth and being young in women that is presented in a feminine way by Rahel Varnhagen and Pauline Wiesel is characterised by the abstinence from a tellable story. Being

young for both women means avoiding fixed meanings, because dreams do not change as long as they do not become language. Transposing youth into age means attaching memories only to the unfulfilled and to wishes thus maintaining youth for oneself as a „germinal urge“. *Rudolf Käser's* contribution makes it possible to place the attitude to life of the two letter writing women presented by *Barbara Hahn* next to a famous epoch making literary figure of Goethe. It is Mignon who tries in a comparable way to preserve her yearnings through silence. *Käser* explains how Mignon's mysterious story is altered before her death into a medical case study and into a „significant memorial picture“ after her death. According to *Käser's* thesis, the provocative „embalmmment of youth“ of this kind expects to encounter an „irritating reaction from the readers“. *Dieter Richter's* article opens up a different aspect in the ambivalences of narrative inquiry into one's own childhood and youth than has been worked out in other papers. Whether the journey into childhood develops into self-reassurance or a vision of horror depends on the way in which evidence is collected and on the work done on the process of recall. The distanced, enlightened observer is only able to perceive the world of his childhood under the aspect of „a wonderful reduction“, whereas the romantic remembering I has no defence against being engulfed by its perception and is taken over into a „time long since extinct“ with all its delights and horrors.

Aspects of the history of mentalities are not missing in any of the essays that have been discussed. They remain however in the tissue of intertextual connections. The following articles on the other hand devote themselves more to the correspondance between the history of mentalities and literary change. The essay of *Hinrich Hudde* proceeds from the shift in mentalities that can be seen in fairy tales from the Renaissance right up to the Romantic Period: the younger the heroes in the fairy tales, the older the male or female narrators become, apparently to cushion the impact of a disappearance of authority. *Hudde* gives special attention to the multiplicity of stylisation that has become necessary in French and German fairy tale literature during this shift.

The comparative approach selected by *Hudde* is deepened and extended by the contribution from *Stéphane Michaud*. His paper starts with the consideration that revolutionary and post-revolutionary France, and especially the metropolis of Paris, presented a very rare socio-political constellation in which youthful dreams of absolute power and their disillusionment could be experienced collectively and fantasies could be lived out. The characterisation of youths was thus a main consideration of the French Romantic Period. *Michaud* is able to show the multiplicity and richness of variation of the crises and errors of youthful desire in Balzac's ‚Comédie Humaine‘. This energy of presentation of youthful „ambitions“ which does not exclude perversions is possible because Balzac had both a poetic-imaginative fantasy and socio-critical powers of observation.

Rudolf Steinlein dedicates himself to a topic that does not seem to be of current interest at first glance, namely the connection between youth and national pride. *Steinlein* describes a discourse of youthful enthusiasm that is not fixed to

specific subjects but can be orientated towards the most varied of objectives which indeed can contradict each other. A vague youthful longing to break out is easily connected with an „imagination of probation“. *Steinlein* uses a diachronic study based on the history of ideas to clarify the latent displacement from a paternally codified, genuine national pride in the 18th century towards maternal fantasies of merging in the early 19th century. *John Neubauer's* article starts with a critical discussion of this displacement. He sets a new accent by referring to the establishment of the grammar school which enabled a more modern feeling of youthful group awareness for the first time. *Neubauer* distinguishes for this reason between the rather lonely growing up around 1800 and the new romantic youth brought up in educational institutions around the 1900.

Thomas Clasen's article could be entitled with the question of the beginning and end of the aesthetic phenomenon of „youth“. The dramas of the Sturm und Drang are not so much a reaction to a finding in terms of the history of mentalities, but rather a fictional anticipation of a protest against convention that is oriented towards the future. The dramas offered in a Shakespearian manner an outstanding medium for experimental models of solving conflicts without involving real risk. The new type of language which avoids distance supports the group identity of youth as a characteristic of demarcation and of feelings of inclusiveness. The post-modern relativisation of the optimism of progress though marginalizes and instrumentalises the creative potential of youth. The academic study of the phenomenon of youth remains in order to preserve the former impetus in proxy, so to speak.