

Robert H. Brown, *Nature's Hidden Terror. Violent Nature Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Germany*. (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture 69) Camden House, Columbia, S.C. 1991. 148 S., \$ 47,-.

For some time now, the secularization of nature portrayal and the bourgeoisification (*Verbürgerlichung*) of literature have been major themes in the discussion of eighteenth-century German literature. Rarely, however, have these developments been set in relation to each other. Robert Brown offers just such a juxtaposition in this revision of his dissertation (University of California at Berkeley, 1990), arguing that violent nature imagery in several works of the Sturm und Drang expresses less a call to social change than reservations toward it.

Brown establishes the context for his discussions of Gerstenberg's *Ugolino*, Goethe's *Werther* and Schiller's *Räuber* in two introductory chapters. The first of these (entitled „Nature Imagery and Social Change“, although the emphasis is on nature rather than imagery) traces the development of nature myth as expressed in the story of the Fall of Adam and Eve and in the *locus amoenus*, connecting the two versions through the notion of nature's violence as punishment for pride (as in the case of Phaeton) or sin. Human response to the natural environment thus ranges from fear and retreat to fascination, exploration and domination. He devotes particular attention to the situation of the individual isolated at society's periphery. This, in turn, provides the basis for consideration of the other major development he perceives in eighteenth-century Germany, namely the evolution of a new class of bourgeoisie lacking access to the mainstream and frequently at odds with the privileged corporate classes. His second chapter („The Lisbon Earthquake“) argues that the shift in thought between 1720 and 1780, for which contemporary reaction to the Lisbon earthquake of 1755 provides the major focus, represents not an outright rejection of optimistic philosophy but rather an undermining of its metaphysical foundations through a shift to a more empirical (that is, social and historical) approach to man's relation to the world and the problem of evil. Brown explicates the metaphysical elements of optimism through Epistle I of Pope's *Essay on Man* without justifying his selection of a British rather than a German writer. Moreover, instead of demonstrating the development of a German audience for Pope's work through translations such as Brockes' *Versuch vom Menschen* (1740), he merely refers (p. 34) to Maupertuis' 1753 call for submission of papers to the Berlin Academy of Sciences treating Pope's assertion „Whatever is, is right“ and thus assumes that a German audience must have existed.

Because Gerstenberg's *Ugolino*, Goethe's *Werther* and Schiller's *Räuber* „were designed to appeal to a new kind of readership no longer bound to the court, but increasingly linked to the market“ and whose life experience was shaped by its „isolation on the fringes of traditional corporate society“ (p. 131), Brown devotes three chapters of about 20 pages each to a close reading of the texts in order to illuminate „contemporary attitudes toward processes of social change in the late eighteenth century“ (p. 58; cf. also pp. 75 and 108f.). Anyone seeking a discussion of the relevant critical literature of these works will be disappointed but can find some of the items included in the list of works consulted. Such a discussion, however, would most likely divert attention from the significant contribution of this study, namely the association of violent nature (destructive storms and floods, stormy night work in the Bohemian forests), violation of nature (Anselmo's cannibalization of his mother's corpse, the Moor brothers' respective attacks on family and the natural order), egoism, and isolation from society. Each work poses a unique problem to which the central character(s) offer(s) a range of potential solutions, and in each case the attempt ends in failure; „patriarchal ideals of altruistic harmony are destroyed by an all-consuming struggle of all against all, transforming nature from peaceful consonance into a self-devouring demon“, not to mention the emergence of the „seamy underside of modern capitalist society – its uncertainty, alienation, and brutal marketplace logic“ (p. 136). Brown's observations concerning the isolation of individuals as expressed in the structure of *Werther* also deserve note.

In accordance with the publisher's policy, the author provides English translations – his own – for all German passages cited and places the original text in a footnote. As a rule, his English version not only captures the sense of the original but also strongly supports his argumentation. Occasionally, however, one finds problems of accuracy for which two examples will suffice. When translating a passage from Herder (p. 52), he renders „mit Treue und Eifer“ literally as „with faith and enthusiasm“, giving a considerably different meaning to the ambiguous English word „faith“