

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

German Language and Literature Papers

Modern Languages and Literatures, Department of

4-27-1991

Review of Axel Kuhn, et al., *Revolutionsbegeisterung an der Hohen Carlsschule*

Priscilla A. Hayden-Roy

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, phayden-roy1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlanggerman>



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Hayden-Roy, Priscilla A., "Review of Axel Kuhn, et al., *Revolutionsbegeisterung an der Hohen Carlsschule*" (1991). *German Language and Literature Papers*. 11.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/modlanggerman/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in German Language and Literature Papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Published in *German Quarterly* 64 (1991), 252-253.

Published by the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG)
112 Haddontowne Ct. #104, Cherry Hill, NJ 08034-3668 USA

<http://germanquarterly.aatg.org/>

Copyright © 1991 American Association of Teachers of German.
Used by permission.

Bertaux's Hölderlin research, to Inge Stephan's study of literary Jacobinism, to work by historians Heinrich Scheel and Walter Grab, an image emerges of a primarily young generation inspired by revolutionary ideals, critical of German territorial princes, involved in Jacobin clubs, in some instances even plotting to overthrow the feudal state. Axel Kuhn, historian at the Technische Hochschule in Stuttgart, has contributed to this body of research with his study of the Hohe Carlsschule, the military academy founded in Stuttgart by Duke Carl Eugen of Württemberg, famous for its oppressively strict discipline and its exceptionally talented students, including Friedrich Schiller. As Kuhn says, the book is written in the form of a detective novel (11), and relates how he went about uncovering and piecing together the story of revolutionary enthusiasm at the Carlsschule. To this end he designed a seminar, enlisting the help of students in sifting through archival materials and—one cannot help but notice—at the same time awakening in them a vicarious enthusiasm as they identified with these newly discovered historical models. (For example, included in the book is a fictitious diary written by one of the seminar members, which relates a cadet's subjective musings on the French Revolution.)

The Carlsschule was a relatively short-lived institution (1770-1794), and thus Kuhn's investigation is limited to a brief span of time, the most interesting events falling roughly between 1790 and 1793. The actors in this drama may be unfamiliar to literary historians: the doctors Johann Georg Kerner (eldest brother of the poet and doctor Justinus Kerner) and Christoph Heinrich Pfaff; the painters Joseph Anton Koch, Johann Heinrich Dannecker, Johann Baptiste Seele, and Karl Gottlieb Schweikert; and a number of the Carlsschule faculty. The students concerned were born around 1770, thus belonging to the same generation as Hegel, Hölderlin, and Schelling who, by the time of the French Revolution, were studying in nearby Tübingen at the only other university in Württemberg. Although Kuhn does not address the possibility of exchanges between the political clubs at the two universities, his study offers an interesting parallel to the activities in Tübingen and brings to light sources that will be helpful in further studies of both groups.

At the center of this investigation are two events instigated by the cadets early in 1791. At a public masquerade in January, attended by the Württemberg ducal family and visiting French nobility, three cadets—who were dressed respectively in blue, red, and white with tricolor sashes—demonstra-

KUHN, AXEL, et al. *Revolutionsbegeisterung an der Hohen Carlsschule*. Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1989. 189 pp. DM 54.

In the last twenty years a number of scholars have discovered growing evidence for revolutionary sympathy and activity among German intellectuals living during the French Revolution. From Pierre

tively stripped away the coat of arms of a fourth cadet, who was dressed as a medieval German nobleman, and tore up his genealogical tree. In March the students again used the masquerade as a political forum: a figure dressed as Saturn came into the dance bearing an urn, set it down on the dance floor, and left as mysteriously as he had come. A while later the urn was emptied; it contained some 200 pieces of paper on which were written French revolutionary slogans. Kuhn is able to date these events (differences in the accounts had previously obscured the precise chronology), and he identifies the persons involved with them. The high point of Kuhn's sleuthing occurs when he lifts the mask of the Saturn figure, under which he finds Jean-Charles Laveaux, professor of French at the Carlsschule. Kuhn's team also tracks down biographical data on the students involved in these events, who in several cases became closely involved with the French Revolution. Many of their paths led to Strasbourg, where a group of German intellectuals and sympathizers of the Revolution gathered and became active in the local Jacobin club. Kuhn and his students analyze German and French archival materials, bringing a wide range of documents to bear on their narrative.

What Kühn's research team has uncovered in terms of new data probably could have been reduced to one solid, interesting article. Despite its rather unorthodox presentation, the book has made a significant contribution to the scholarship of this period. Some readers will grow impatient with the amount of speculative guesswork included in the account; others will lift an eyebrow at the fictional pieces Kuhn could not resist including. But all must admire how the historian has involved his students in his research, how generously he has cited their work, and how he communicated to them his sense of purpose in uncovering some roots of a democratic tradition in Germany.

PRISCILLA HAYDEN-ROY

University of Nebraska, Lincoln