Introduction

The fundamental concern of Romanticism, which brought about its inception, determined its development and set its end, was the need to create a new language for religion. More than a response to Kant and post-critical philosophy, this study illustrates that what was at stake for the members of the movement was the eclipse of a transcendent realist ontology, a way of conceptualising reality that had been central to the West since Plato. This examination explores how Early German Romanticism, Frühromantik, responded to the problems of its age by proposing a form of transcendence for an age of immanence.

The Romantic concept of religion responded to changes that occurred during the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. This period was marked by a confluence of significant and determinative transformations characterised by the gradual transposition of the system and structure of knowledge by which we conceptualise the world, from an understanding of reality secured in the transcendent, where the meaning and truth of things ultimately resided with the supernatural, to an immanent understanding, set over and against the transcendent, where meaning was grounded in the natural order.[1] The transcendent worldview constituted a theurgic cosmos, wherein all finite reality was shaped by the transcendent forces in which it participated. This participation assured that creation was more than matter; it was sacramental, connected to divinity and hence mysterious and revelatory. The forces which shaped created reality, variously understood as God, angels or demons, could be

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 542.

interacted with and influenced, though not wholly controlled, through sacraments, magic or prayer. Over a long period, this transcendent worldview changed through a process of conceptual evolution and reform, which tamed the concepts of uncontrolled and supernatural forces. Coalescing in the Reformation, and affected through a growing middle class, this process increasingly conceptualised religion as personal, the self as autonomous, nature as law governed and society as civil.[2] Within this increasingly immanent framework, the conception of reality shifted from a theocentric outlook, wherein the self participated in a hierarchical, vertically orientated cosmos where meaning ultimately resided in the supernatural, to an anthropocentric outlook, wherein meaning resided with the self, existing within a horizontally orientated cosmos, and possessed of a telos of autarky.[3]

By the final decade of the eighteenth century, the shift toward immanent naturalism had generated a series of problems: Enlightenment rationalism and empirical materialism presaged determinism; historicism and biblical higher criticism portended relativism; the critique of metaphysics undermined rational religion, seemingly leaving faith to either irrational enthusiasm or dogmatism; finally, revolutionary anti-clericalism and individualism threatened anomie by undermining the bulwarks of community.[4] Each of these developments reflected and further affected a long-term shift in the way reality was conceptualised. Romantic religion was not and could not be a return to a halcyon theology of old. The explanatory success of the immanent understanding of reality – wherein categories of understanding were initially able to stand on their own without transcendent referents, and without having to conform to ecclesial strictures – prevented this. Yet it was

[2] These developments are considered in many studies, including Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1966); Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); *A Secular Age*; Jerome B. Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[3] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 138, 152.

[4] Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy: Kant and His Predecessors* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 361–68; Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany*, vol. 2: *1648–1840*, 3 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), II, 278–354; Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); James J. Sheehan, *German History, 1770–1866* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 324–88.

also the increasing inability of immanent categories to transcend themselves, to extend beyond their own finite limitations, that had brought about the crisis conditions that captivated the attention of Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century, and to which Frühromantik would respond.

Every study of Romanticism faces the palimpsest that is the movement's definition, inherited both from the originators of the movement and by later scholars and critics. Not unlike other movements, but perhaps to an intensified degree, Romanticism is a designation whose generality is ultimately elusive. We find this in its dating, which ranges widely, whether we consider poetry, music, or fine art, or its radically differing national manifestations, from the cultural nationalism of Scottish Romanticism (c. 1760–1820) to the macabre pessimism of Portuguese and Brazilian Ultrarromantismo (c. 1830–1865). Despite the liberality with which the designation is used, one manifestation of Romanticism has particular claim to this title – namely, its inventors: the early German Romantics, the Frühromantiker. German Romanticism has traditionally been divided into three periods: Früh-, Hoch- and Spätromantik. Though not unproblematic, this division remains useful, each period having differing fundamental concerns and often distinct actors and geographical centres. In this study, where the term 'Romanticism' is used, it is meant to refer to Frühromantik unless otherwise noted.

Frühromantik scarcely lasted more than half a decade, from around 1795 to 1801. However, it was from its German inception in Mitteleuropa that Romantic movements at all points of the compass developed. At the movement's centre was the community that formed around the brothers Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel. It included Friedrich Schleiermacher, Friedrich von Hardenberg (known by his nom de plume Novalis) and more distantly Ludwig Tieck, Wilhelm Wackenroder, Friedrich Schelling and Friedrich Hölderlin. More recently this list has grown to include the wives of Friedrich Schlegel and Schelling, Dorothea and Caroline, respectively. Other major figures, such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Schiller and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, while overlapping with Frühromantik, are not considered to be members of the movement; alternately, Hölderlin can and should be considered a Romantic based on the questions he engaged, the sources he used and the problems that occupied him. This study examines the work of Friedrich Schlegel, Friedrich von Hardenberg and Friedrich Hölderlin and their unique attempts to devise a language of transcendence

for an immanent age.[5] It takes into account their literary and philosophical production from the start of their careers to a natural close in the first few years of the nineteenth century when the members of Early German Romanticism disassociated. For Schlegel, this close was the conclusion of his lectures on transcendental philosophy and his departure from Jena, where the Romantic circle had first congregated. In the case of Hölderlin it was the first sustained period of his worsening mental illness. Finally, for Novalis, this cessation was his untimely death, brought about by tuberculosis.[6]

Frühromantik has been the subject of many studies, and there is no need for another history of German Romantic literature, treating each character of the movement equally, with the aim of offering an overall representation of the movement.[7] More recently, a range of scholarship has examined the philosophical dimension of Romanticism.[8] The strengths of this preceding scholarship, and the issues and questions that have been left unattended, have helped to determine the parameters of this study, allowing it licence to treat some areas more lightly, while necessitating detailed foregrounding in others. What is considered here is the central role of religion in the movement. In the case of Early German Romanticism, the term 'religion' itself must here be clarified. This study

[5] For Schleiermacher, see Chapter 10.

[6] Consequently, this examination does not take up the still underexplored later career of Schlegel, which is notable for the further evolution of his religious thought and his conversion to Catholicism.

[7] Rudolf Haym, *Die Romantische Schule: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* (Berlin: Gaertner, 1870); Richarda Huch, *Blütezeit der Romantik* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1899); *Ausbreitung und Verfall der Romantik* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1902); Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik: Eine Skizze* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908); *German Romanticism*, trans. Alma Elsie Lussky (New York: Putnam, 1932); Paul Kluckhohn, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik* (Bielefeld: Velhagen & Klasing, 1924); Myer H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953); *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (1973); Gert Ueding, *Klassik und Romantik: deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter der Französischen Revolution 1789–1815* (Munich: C. Hanser, 1987); Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992); Gerhard Schulz, *Romantik: Geschichte und Begriff* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1996); Theodore Ziolkowski, *Das Wunderjahr in Jena: Geist und Gesellschaft 1794/95* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1998).

[8] Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1997); Fredrick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Dieter Henrich, *Grundlegung aus dem Ich: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte des Idealismus: Tubingen-Jena (1790–1794)*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004); Dalia Nassar, *The Romantic Absolute: Being and Knowing in Early German Romantic Philosophy, 1795–1804* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

does not attempt to explore the relationship of Romanticism to orthodoxy, nor the attempts of certain Romantics to reform the institutions of the church. Still less does it aim to demonstrate how the movement's thought fits either into the history of Protestantism or into a re-discovered Roman Catholicism.[9] What has hindered an understanding of Romantic religion in the past has been the narrowly defined conceptualisation of the term 'religion' itself. All too often this has left Romantic religiosity to be judged against an ossified understanding of religion as institutional and doctrinal. Instead, this study considers the creative attempts of the Romantics to invent a renewed means for understanding and describing transcendence.

To enumerate Romanticism's characteristics – feeling, longing, inwardness – is to create a catalogue of yet more elusive terms, while to list the manifestations of its apparent concerns – reactionary and radical, communitarian and individualistic, nationalistic and universalist – is to generate contraries. Even the nature of Romanticism's self-conception as organic, non-discursive, and non-systematic seems to militate, sometimes intentionally, against definition. Put more simply, what could Novalis' deep meditations on life, death and lost love possibly have in common with Gérard de Nerval's walking his lobster through the Palais-Royal gardens? In the early twentieth century, the intellectual historian A. O. Lovejoy pointed out the impossibility of the problem, and began to write of 'Romanticisms' instead.[10] Isaiah Berlin objected to this abandonment, but conceded that the task of defining Romanticism 'is like that dark cave described by Virgil, where all footsteps lead in one direction . . . those who enter it seem never to emerge again.'[11] Elsewhere it has been suggested that the characteristics of the movement are really more reflective of perennial concerns present in all eras.[12]

[9] Karl Barth, *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert: ihre Vorgeschichte und ihre Geschichte* (Zollikon: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947); Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, vol. I: *1799–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); Thomas Franklin O'Meara, *Romantic Idealism and Roman Catholicism: Schelling and the Theologians* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

[10] Arthur O. Lovejoy, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 39 (1924), 229–53.

[11] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico, 2000), 1.

[12] Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion: Romantic versus Classic Art* (London: Murray, 1973); Herbert Read, *Reason and Romanticism* (London: Faber, 1926); Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism: Studies in Early Nineteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 2.

Frühromantik does not escape this problem of definition; however, some of this confusion may be understood through the characterisation of the movement as a development of either post-Kantian Fichtean aesthetic egoism or Spinozistic monist pantheism. Both positions are in fact influential on the movement but are also both mutually exclusive, and equally exclusive of the transcendent realism which this study maintains as essential to the thought of the Romantic movement. The upshot of this characterisation has been the long-standing debate concerning the definition and character of Early German Romanticism. To characterise the movement as either Spinozist or Fichtian subsumes the movement into a wider secularisation narrative, since both philosophers advanced immanent philosophies, locating their foundational principles either in the self or in a singular substance that constituted all reality, as opposed to ideas such as the Good or God, which transcend immanent reality. Consequently, either characterisation of the movement has overwhelmingly located Frühromantik within the secularisation narrative, associating its ideas with the progressive decline and disappearance of religion. These two obscuring factors – the overassociation of Early German Romanticism with substance monism or transcendental idealism and the characterisation of the movement as part of an overall process of secularisation – are taken to account in this re-evaluation of Frühromantik.

This study demonstrates that while the philosophical orientations represented by Spinoza and Fichte were fundamental to the development of Romanticism, it was the imaginative inspiration of the Platonic-Christian realist tradition that allowed Early German Romanticism to transcend the limitations of the two, while retaining elements of both. Furthermore, the presence of Platonic realism in Frühromantik allows one to understand how the movement sought to break down the increasingly sharpened distinction between transcendence and immanence, setting the movement on an opposed trajectory to secularisation. Romanticism did this by taking account of the central Spinozist claim that there was nothing apart from God, and accepting the fundamental insight of post-Kantian idealism, that the mind is fundamental to structuring our experience. Equally the Romantics rejected Spinoza's rational limitations that rendered God wholly immanent, and challenged the limitations which transcendental idealism placed on the possible knowledge of the transcendent. From these two seeming philosophical extremes, and with the insights afforded by the tradition of Platonic realism, the Frühromantiker began to synthesise a new position from the two wherein all individual being, including the self, inhered and participated in absolute being, which itself

transcended immanence. To actively engage this participatory ontology, Romanticism turned to the language of neither philosophy nor theology, but to aesthetics, which combined both. In turn, in the thought of the Frühromantiker, all reality came to be aestheticised within a participatory framework, wherein all creation had the potential to disclose the presence of the divine. Accordingly, the Romantic concept of religion was neither the assertion of an immanent form of secularised religion nor an attempt to return to an orthodox theology of transcendence as it had been constructed in the past. Instead, this study offers a new understanding of Early German Romanticism through the claim that its central concern was to forge a new language for transcendence in an age that had come to think in terms of immanence.

This study seeks to develop a position distinct from the conventional understanding of Romanticism by exploring the central religious dimension of the movement in new contexts. In doing so, it yields a new understanding of the motivations and aims behind the movement and furthermore reveals the importance of the movement for our understanding of religion today. Part I lays out the parameters whereby this study proceeds. First, in Chapter 1, through a comparison of poems by Schiller and Hölderlin, the important concept of participation, or methexis, is set out in relation to the historical circumstances from which Romanticism emerged. Next, in Chapter 2, key terms relating to the metaphysical realism of the Romantic project are delineated and elaborated in relation to the philosophically complex concept of transcendentals. The following two chapters set out the task of re-contextualising Romanticism. Chapter 3 does so in relation to the movement's problematic characterisation as an aestheticised subjectivist form of post-Kantian transcendental idealism. Chapter 4 carries out a similar task in relation to the definitionally narrow and secularising understanding of religion responsible for the underappreciation of Frühromantik's religious dimension. Both re-contextualisations work to move Romantic religion out from the imposing shadows of transcendental idealism and the secularisation narrative, allowing the movement's realist religious claims to come to light.

Part II of this study takes particular care to reconstruct the intellectual landscape from which Romanticism would emerge. This topography is defined by the problem of the absolute (i.e., unconditioned totality), which came to be the focus of philosophical and theological attention in the final decades of the eighteenth century through the influential, but problematic, proposals for an immanent absolute, found in the opposing

philosophies of Spinoza's substance monism and Fichte's absolute 'I', as described in Chapter 5. In opposition to these two influential proposals, the study then devotes Chapters 6–8 to the thought of three often overlooked figures – Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Johann Gottfried Herder and Karl Philipp Moritz – each of whom develops influential alternative proposals that point back toward a transcendent realist understanding of the absolute fundamental for the development of, and our understanding of, the Romantic project.

With the critical framework and historical background set out in the first two parts of this study, Part III takes up the Romantic religious thought of Schlegel, Hölderlin and Novalis, three defining participants of the movement. However, before these are elaborated, Chapter 9 sets out the key realist Platonic concepts that inform Romantic thought. Platonism provides an alternative transcendent absolute to the immanent proposals of Spinoza and Fichte. Influenced by the Platonic model, the three Romantics develop metaphysically realist philosophical positions, which are nevertheless informed by the insights of idealism. In carrying out this project, Schlegel, Hölderlin and Novalis develop a range of strategies to transcend the limitations of Spinoza and Fichte's immanent positions, allowing them to synthesise elements of idealism and realism. The three Romantics considered in this part achieve this through an aesthetic methodology whose resistance to foundationalism follows from the fact that the transcendent absolute of Platonic realism can only ever be infinitely approximated and can therefore never constitute a non-inferential foundation. Though this transcendent absolute cannot be conceptually articulated, it is nevertheless made intelligible through the aesthetic strategies developed by each of the three figures. These strategies have the end of reintroducing transcendence to an age of immanence.

The Conclusion of this study considers the dual religious legacy of the Romantic re-invention of religion: its call to build a new spiritual community and its aesthetic individualisation of religion. In the first instance, the movement had far-reaching effects throughout the nineteenth century as a dynamic source for institutional renewal, breathing new life into liturgy, restoring the role of the arts in the church, and providing a middle ground between dogmatic bibliolatry and reductive higher criticism. By way of contrast, the twentieth century has seen the increasing withdrawal of religion into private forms. This is reflected in overall institutional decline and the recent growth of the 'spiritual but not religious' category. However, the legacy of Romanticism extends beyond these outcomes. It opposed the institutional tendency toward ossification, while at the same

time it expressed desire for community resisted this privatisation. This suggests that Romanticism may yet have a contribution to make, as a movement which continually seeks to renew religion. Romanticism's story is one of re-enchantment, and transcendence regained; as such, it can tell us much about the shape of religion today.

The continuing interest in the origins of modernity, initially stimulated by debates about modernism and post-modernism, and now by questions of secularisation and post-secularism, bends our attention to Romanticism as one of the first sustained attempts to engage the problems arising from the long-term transposition from the transcendent to the immanent understanding of reality, which we continue to occupy. Romanticism sought to invent a new language of transcendence, and as such established a precedent that continues to define contemporary religious discourse. Accordingly, it was neither the assertion of an immanent form of secularised religion with a regulative abstract concept of the absolute nor an attempt to return to an orthodox theology of transcendence. Rather, bringing together elements of the new idealist philosophy with the inheritance of Platonic-Christian realism, Romanticism sought to forge a new metaphysics and epistemology of transcendence through the language of aesthetics.