

Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion

Early German Romanticism sought to respond to a comprehensive sense of spiritual crisis that characterised the late eighteenth century. The study demonstrates how the Romantics sought to bring together the new post-Kantian idealist philosophy with the inheritance of the realist Platonic-Christian tradition. With idealism they continued to champion the individual, while from Platonism they took the notion that all reality, including the self, participated in absolute being. This insight was expressed not in the language of theology or philosophy but through aesthetics, which recognised the potentiality of all creation, including artistic creation, to disclose the divine. In explicating the religious vision of Romanticism, this study offers a new historical appreciation of the movement, and furthermore demonstrates its importance for our understanding of religion today.

Alexander J. B. Hampton is Assistant Professor in Christianity at the University of Toronto. He specialises in the philosophy of religion, religion and nature and religious aesthetics. His research considers the role of poetics and Platonism in the shaping of the Christian tradition.

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*The Reconciliation of German Idealism
and Platonic Realism*

ALEXANDER J. B. HAMPTON

University of Toronto



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Da die Götter menschlicher noch waren,
Waren Menschen göttlicher

– Friedrich Schiller

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Note on Translations</i>	xi
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xii
Introduction	I
PART I ROMANTIC RELIGION: TRANSCENDENCE FOR AN AGE OF IMMANENCE	
1 The Romantic Vocation	13
2 Realism, Idealism and the Transcendentals	20
3 Re-Contextualising Romanticism: The Problem of Subjectivity	29
4 Re-Contextualising Romanticism: The Question of Religion	46
PART II GIVE ME A PLACE TO STAND: THE ABSOLUTE AT THE TURN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	
5 The Immanent Absolute: Spinoza and Fichte	59
6 Jacobi and the Transcendence of the Absolute	67
7 Herder and the Immanent Presence of the Transcendent Absolute	89
8 Moritz and the Aesthetics of the Absolute	108

PART III ROMANTIC RELIGION: THE POET'S VOCATION

9	Platonism and the Transcendent Absolute	125
10	Schlegel: The Poetic Search for an Unknown God	133
11	Hölderlin: Becoming and Dissolution in the Absolute	157
12	Novalis: The Desire to Be at Home in the World	187
	Conclusion: Our Romantic Future	213
	<i>Bibliography</i>	222
	<i>Index</i>	246

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It was the study of the English iteration of Romanticism, and namely that of Coleridge, that led me, by often sublime and sometimes tortuous routes, to the study of Early German Romanticism. It is a movement, particularly in its early form, that shares so many concerns with our own.

Romanticism still resonates in contemporary culture, in the view of the creative imagination, in the notion of inspired genius, in the sense of the sacred attributed both to nature and to art, even in a time that speaks and thinks largely in immanent language. The Romantic desire to give expression to the sense ‘of something far more deeply interfused’, to borrow from Coleridge’s fellow-poet Wordsworth, remains with us. We fail to give the movement attention at our own peril, for in the two hundred years since the advent of Romantic thought, the forces that gave rise to it have yet to abate. It has much to contribute, as we continue to live the legacy of its successes and failures. The first step to its appreciation is an understanding of the movement and what gave rise to it. This book is a contribution to that endeavour.

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Cape Hatteras
21 October 2018

Note on Translations

All translations are those of the author unless otherwise noted. Wherever possible, existing translations have been consulted, as acknowledged in the Bibliography. In places where poetic verse is quoted, it appears in the original German with an English translation in the notes. These prose renderings offer a literal translation but do not attempt to replicate the poetical qualities of the verse. All other translations appear in English only.

Abbreviations

- HKA Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs (Historische-kritische Ausgabe)*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel, Gerhard Schulz and Hans-Joachim Mähl (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960–2006), 6 vols.
- GSA Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin Sämtliche Werke (Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe)*, ed. Friedrich Beißner and Adolf Beck (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1946–85), 6 vols.
- KA Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler et al. (Munich: Schönigh, 1958–2002), 35 vols.