

## Editorial

We are delighted to publish this third issue of *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism*. Our first issue in 2019 attempted to highlight the philosophical stature of romanticism with regard to idealism by underscoring some of the ideas and methods shared by these two currents; our second issue in 2020 focused on the thought of the women writers of romanticism, contributing to contemporary critiques of the received philosophical canon. The present 2021 issue aims to do further justice to another essential dimension of early German Romanticism: its rich reflections on science. Not just “science” understood in an absolute and singular sense as an immutable truth of metaphysical speculation, but science in its new, properly modern and exact status, as it took shape during the second half of the eighteenth century. This period ushered in an era in which knowledge became specialised through empirical and experimental research; in so doing, the “sciences” became genuinely plural, seeking to integrate the totality of what is cognizable in the most varied disciplines and fields.

We are honoured to have Leif Weatherby, Associate Professor of German Literature at New York University and author of *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx*<sup>1</sup> as the guest editor of the main section. His introduction provides an overview of this issue’s seven research articles and the question of Science and German Romanticism. We are extremely grateful to him, and the authors of these articles – Stefani Engelstein, Jocelyn Holland, Alberto Bonchino, Gabrielle Reid, Steven Lydon, Gabriel Trop, and Márcio Suzuki – for their outstanding work in tackling such a challenging topic.

In these sombre times of a pandemic when a devastating virus has spread among human beings, transmitting a hitherto unknown disease, the current volume particularly concerns the concepts of the organism and scientific hypothesis, the processes of life, health, and medicine, as well as the notions of form, polarity, the sound figures, and individuation. In direct continuity with this theme of science, this issue additionally contains eight new and for the most part never-before published translations of short texts or excerpts by different German Romantic thinkers and scientists. Diverse fields such as biology, chemistry, physics, physiology, mathematics, and astronomy, are all addressed in original source texts by Franz von Baader,

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<sup>1</sup> Leif Weatherby, *Transplanting the Metaphysical Organ: German Romanticism between Leibniz and Marx* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016).

Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, Karoline von Günderode, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, and Carl Gustav Carus.

With regard to the topic at hand, let us simply add a few words about the broader problem of whether “Romantic science” can or should indeed be classified as *science* as such. Ever since the academic field of philosophical romanticism emerged and was consolidated in recent decades, notably due, among others, to the seminal work of Manfred Frank, Elizabeth Millán Brusslan, Frederick C. Beiser and Jocelyn Holland, there has been a growing awareness that the “transcendental poetry” to which *Frühromantik* attaches such great importance, is not (solely) a matter of writing in verse (or literary writing) but actually concerns all areas of human activity and inquiry. In this respect, it is not superfluous to quote again the famous *Athenaeum* fragment 116: “Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry. [...] It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also – more than any other form – hover at the midpoint between the portrayed (*Dargestellte*) and the portrayer (*Darstellende*), free of all real and ideal self-interest.”<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, who sadly passed away recently in August 2021, had, along with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, made this definition of romantic poetry the basis of a speculative reading of Jena Romanticism. Their ground-breaking research, especially in *The Literary Absolute*, similarly stimulated an entire generation of scholars in France, the USA, and in many other countries. However, a reading of romanticism as a philosophy of literature detached from the world, caught up in the autotelic and reflexive movement of its own production,<sup>3</sup> is perhaps overly restrictive, and does not entirely fit with the other key romantic ambition of an encyclopaedic totality of scientific knowledge about nature.

Indeed, among the Romantics, Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Franz von Baader and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), were all trained in the sciences by some of the leading natural scientists of the time. While many of the other Romantics likewise engaged with the latest scientific findings, simultaneously seeking to express in writing their views on this scientific research and the multiplicity and complexity of the natural world.

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<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Fragments in der Zeitschrift Athenaeum* (1798/1800), frag. 116, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Bd. II, hrsg. von H. Eichner, München-Paderborn, Schöningh, 1967, p. 182. English translation: *Philosophical Fragments*, translated by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, “Avant-propos”, in: *L’Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris : Seuil, 1978), pp. 8-28. English: “Preface”, *The Literary Absolute. The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, translated by Philip Bernard and Cheryl Lester (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), pp. 1-17.

As new editions of their works further confirm, the Jena Romantics developed a worldview far removed from some of the clichés found in older scholarship of mere nostalgic or ethereal visionaries. Rather, their philosophies are the consequence of a knowledge of nature remarkably grounded in and informed by contemporary scientific progress and discoveries. To be sure, a series of questions remain: Did they derive their conception of science from a poetic programme or vice-versa? Was their interest in the sciences more about science as a methodological instrument than about concrete knowledge of the empirical world? That is to say, does it more concern the inner dynamics of an implementable form of scientific thinking than achievable technical results or scientific experiments?

Moreover, during the same period when a pluralisation and specialisation of knowledge was emerging and the institutionalisation of philosophy as a discipline in its own right was becoming an object of intense debate among philosophers themselves, the early Romantics dared to transgress disciplinary boundaries and explore interactions between fields that are usually divided in a binary manner. Here Romanticism not only brought literature and philosophy into dialogue, but interlinked these disciplines with countless others, including history, anthropology, linguistics (philology), and psychology, and in a no less fruitful way, with the natural sciences, now called the ‘hard’ or ‘exact’ sciences as opposed to the ‘humanities’.

The current issue of *Symphilosophie* therefore reflects this romantic interdisciplinarity *avant la lettre*: a dialogue across the gulf of traditionally separated disciplines, with that separation not always being fully justified. Some of the contributions published in this issue were written by researchers belonging, academically and disciplinarily, to the sphere of literary studies or German studies; they enter into syncretic discourse with articles by historians of philosophy. All the pieces defend an approach that combines a heterogeneity of languages and modes of argumentation with a plurality of intellectual backgrounds, which is less prevalent in groups solely composed of “professional philosophers.” We believe there is no better way to do justice to the Romantic ideal of symphilosophy today than with these genuine interdisciplinary exchanges.

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The cover image of issue 3 shows a 1989 work by the Swiss artist Jean Tinguely, to which Tinguely gave the somewhat anachronistic title “Heraklit beim Erfinden des Wackelkontakts” (Heraclitus Inventing the Loose Contact). This preparatory drawing in mixed media, felt-tip pen, pencil,

watercolour, gouache and collage on white paper, is part of a series of kinetic sculptures conceived as mechanistic portraits of philosophers, in homage to dialectical thinking that reconciles opposites. It is now in the Museum Tinguely in Basel. Connecting-disconnecting: such is the dialectical object that Tinguely's Heraclitus brings into play. With one foot in one era (antiquity) of which only vestiges remain, and the other foot already in modernity, the image announces the dawning of a new civilisation and a different cognitive functioning. It seems appropriate to draw a parallel between Tinguely's mental portrait of the ancient Greek philosopher of becoming and German Romanticism's relationship to science. Heraclitus's thought not only forms a crucial philosophical point of reference for the Romantics, whose dynamic thinking proceeds by means of ruptures, logical leaps, and the synthesizing of opposing poles to generate creative sparks. But the flamboyant flash of energy emanating from the contact in Tinguely's drawing (the broad line of red paint) echoes Galvani's *Berührungselektrizität*, a discovery that indelibly marked the development of German Romanticism and its reflections on science.

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The main section of next year's issue of *Symphilosophie* 4 (2022) will be devoted to the relationship between the Dutch philosopher Frans Hemsterhuis and Early German Romanticism. We are very pleased to announce that Daniel Whistler (Royal Holloway, University of London) will be the guest editor of this main section on Hemsterhuis. In addition, submissions of research articles are still open for the "Miscellaneous" section of this fourth issue. These articles may be on any topic related to German romantic philosophy, and submissions can be in English, French, Italian, or German. Contributors are also invited to submit review essays, book reviews, and new translations of original source materials. As the year 2022 is the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the two major romantic figures, Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), contributions on their philosophies would be particularly welcome. The deadline for this fourth issue is 31 March 2022.

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Finally, we would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the translators who have contributed to this third issue, especially to the translators new to *Symphilosophie*: Jocelyn Holland, Charlotte Morel, Carlos Zorrilla Piña,

Alberto Bonchino, and James D. Reid. Thanks to their vital work of translating, introducing and annotating, a number of source texts essential for a better understanding of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century German philosophy are now available to all scholars. Besides the group of translations relating to the topic of science, this year's "Miscellaneous" section includes two other original philosophical translations by Emmanuel Chaput and Marie-Michèle Blondin. We are also appreciative of the authors of the book reviews who are making better known some of the most recent academic scholarship. The "Bulletin" at the end of this issue furthermore lists many more of the latest editions, book publications, events, conferences, and calls for papers, relating to German romantic and idealist philosophy. Lastly, we extend our warmest thanks to our many expert peer reviewers from around the globe, and not least to our wonderful editorial team for all their hard work.

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We will close this editorial by drawing attention to the recent opening of Das Deutsche Romantik-Museum (The German Romanticism Museum) in Frankfurt, the first museum entirely devoted to Romanticism. It not only intends to display certain paintings by Caspar David Friedrich, Carl Gustav Carus, or Carl Blechen, among others, but also to publicly exhibit handwritten manuscripts, portraits, and personal objects of the members of German Romanticism. The result of over ten years of work by the Freies Deutsches Hochstift, the museum officially opened its doors on 14 September 2021. On that occasion two actors performed a *Dramolett* (playlet) composed by the writer Daniel Kehlmann, in which two characters discuss, with delicious irony, the importance of Romanticism in the history of European culture. We'll finish with this sentence, uttered at the very beginning of the dialogue: "Ohne die Romantik wären wir nicht, was wir sind!"<sup>4</sup> (Without Romanticism, we would not be what we are!)

Padua and Brussels, 12 December 2021

Giulia Valpione  
Laure Cahen-Maurel

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<sup>4</sup> Daniel Kehlmann, "Die Empfindung als Wille und Werbetext", published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 September 2021.