

technischen Mitteln allein nicht lichten lässt. Eine abschließende Antwort auf diese Frage bleibt zukünftigen Arbeiten von Frank oder anderen philosophischen Stimmen überlassen.

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Owen Ware, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2025, 280pp., ISBN 9780197763964

In his excellent new monograph, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature*, Owen Ware addresses two overriding concerns. First: Why was the Romantic Generation so keenly interested in mythology and the constructive possibilities of myth-making in the modern age? Second: How and why did both German and English-language iterations of Romanticism develop this preoccupation (p. 17)? Ware's answers to these questions are correspondingly twofold. Ware argues, based on a broad but thematically focused reading of representative figures, that both the English and German Romantic traditions give voice to a simmering discontent with Enlightenment rationality. Of particular concern in this connection, Ware claims, is the tendency of analytical rationality and concomitant mechanistic interpretations of the world to produce "fragmented" forms of life – individuals and communities that experience the world in terms of a tension or even antagonism between sense and reason, subject and object, finite and infinite, etc. English-language and German romantics alike sought to remedy this fragmentation by appealing to the *poetic* power of myth (significant differences among their relative valuations and deployments of mythic tropes and forms notwithstanding). Myth, they believed, offered a way of poetically articulating the "unity of all things." As such, myth could simultaneously satisfy reason and sense by activating the imagination's capacity to integrate those aspects of life that modernity had left "fragmented" – though never as a return to sheer immediacy, naiveté, or "simple" wholeness (41). These claims will seem familiar to scholars of Romanticism. But Ware's explanation of these tendencies is particularly strong. It is well-supported by his careful readings, contextual scholarship, and keen sensitivity to the often-implicit resonances between various Romantic authors and texts. One of Ware's

major successes is his deflation of the Romantic tendency to self-mythologization (in the pejorative sense) by showing that their collective turn to myth and myth-making was part of a broader and older reconsideration and reevaluation of myth in the late Enlightenment. In that connection, the Romantics' emphasis on the poetic power of myth to engender "unitive cognitions" and to foster the ideal of "reciprocal determination" allowed them to chart a course between interpretations of myth available in the European intellectual milieu of the day (198).

As noted, Ware's book treats the importance of myth in both German and English-language romantics. Admittedly, my review tends to emphasize the German portion of the story, as that is where my expertise lies. But because *Return of the Gods* ambitiously engages Romantic literature in both German and English, it involves no small amount of "togglng" back and forth between times and places. Ware's singular thematic focus and careful rationale for these shifts in content allow him to navigate this complex map without disorienting the reader. In the introduction, the author establishes his approach and aim: he will show that the Romantics' concern with myth is born from the desire to engender "unitive cognitions" of the whole through the exemplary use of the "principle of contraries" (e.g., *Wechselwirkung* or coincidence of opposites). Ware claims that this is the "key" to Romantic theories of imagination and associated views of myth and mythopoesis (15, 214). The introduction also offers a helpful clarification of terms and a justification for Ware's capacious view of the Romantic canon (without which the scholarly fruit born of Ware's contextualism would be greatly diminished).

The first chapter offers a penetrating interpretation of Friedrich Schiller, who Ware rightly identifies as the crucial transitional figure in the romantic reevaluation of myth. Crucially, Schiller seeks an ideal poetic form that attains a "total harmony of our powers," though without succumbing to the delusion that any *original* wholeness or naivety can be restored (36). The next chapter deals with Schelling, Friedrich Schlegel, and the anonymous author of the "Oldest System Program of German Idealism." Setting their respective comments on myth in the context of Schiller's ideal, Ware shows how these authors explore the potential of mythopoesis for resolving the immanent conflicts or tensions within consciousness, thus insisting (while echoing certain features of Fichte's path to post-Kantian idealism) that such myth-making must be *self-conscious*. Ware also highlights the contributions of Winckelmann (who calls for modern imitation of classical values through myth), Hamann (who sees the fate of classical myth as linked to a decline in the powers of the imagination), and Herder (who is perhaps the first to

explicitly propose the task of developing a “new mythology”) (57-62). Chapter Three pivots to Britain to explore the works of Blake, Coleridge, and Wordsworth. Ware offers an account of Blake’s exposure to certain proto-Romantic ideas from German-language authors. It is in conversation with the mystical works of Böhme, for instance, that Blake developed his view of progress through “contraries” (85). Ware also makes the novel observation (to this reviewer anyway) that Blake would have been exposed to Winckelmann’s classicism when Blake’s friend, Henry Fuseli, translated the former’s works into English (95-96). That places the seeds of the English turn to myth several years prior to Coleridge’s famous and decisive exposure to Romanticism during his studies on the continent. The chapter continues with readings of Coleridge and Wordsworth. Ware argues that these authors shared the early German Romantic desideratum of “unitive cognition” but were rather less sanguine about the prospect of “creating” myths to achieve this. Chapter Four carries us back to Germany to interpret the literary works of Friedrich Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Novalis. Of particular note is Ware’s insightful reading of Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which he calls the “paradigmatic novel of the early romantic period” (148). This paradigmatic status is owing to the works’ exemplary presentation of the link between mythopoesis and the “jolt” of self-recognition and attainment of self-consciousness from its latency or embeddedness within the (previously) unconscious work of imagination (154-158). Ware then jumps across the English Channel once more to examine the second-generation Romantics John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ware concludes by situating Romanticism within a (broadly) Platonic metaphysical tradition, arguing for the continued relevance of their views of mythology today, and dispelling certain “myths” propounded by critics of the Romantic movement.

In addition to its clear scholarly merit, *Return of the Gods* is a timely work. This is so in at least two senses. First, the book is of a piece with a growing body of recent English-language scholarship expressing a renewed interest in the impact of Platonism and Neoplatonism on romanticism.¹ In this sense, Ware’s approach might be understood as a corrective to narrowly post-Kantian construals of Romanticism (this is a strength of the work, but also leaves it open to certain legitimate criticisms – more on this below). Ware never overstates the Platonic resonances of Romanticism, however. He takes great care to indicate that while Romantic uses of myth were dependent in

¹ See, for example: Alexander J.B. Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge University Press, 2019). And: W. Ezekiel Goggin and Sean Hannan, *Mysticism and Materialism in the Wake of German Idealism* (Routledge, 2022).

significant and even decisive senses upon Platonic and Neoplatonic *topoi* (e.g., *exitus-reditus*, *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of reason and sensibility in beauty, etc.), they are very much of their own historical moment. At the same time, Ware's contextualism does not lead him into reductive historicism. In keeping with the Romantic authors that are his focus, it is precisely his concern with the concrete particularity of the Romantic turn to myth that allows Ware to gesture toward its potentially universal significance. The author's contextualist approach also dovetails with his effort to deflate certain myths about the Romantics – chief among these being perhaps their obfuscatory tendency to self-mythologization with respect to the “originality” of their insights. The anonymous author of the “Oldest System Program of German Idealism” is emblematic of this tendency for Ware. Far from a *sui generis* curiosity, Ware shows how the Romantic turn to myth is an intervention in longstanding Enlightenment debates about myth – Platonism versus primitivism, the wisdom of antiquity versus the audacity of modernity, etc. While the story Ware tells in this connection is filled with familiar characters (Novalis, Schlegel, Schelling, Coleridge, and other Romantics *par excellence*), his reading of transitional figures (proto-Romantics such as Schiller, Herder, and Blake) is crucial for understanding how the presumptions and provocations of an earlier generation of scholars (particularly the classicist J.J. Winckelmann) were transmitted to the Romantics and shaped their approach to mythology.

As I've noted, Ware's most recent outing is laudable for its sharp thematic focus on Romantic and proto-Romantic rehabilitations of myth. This allows him to connect the dots between a wide range of thinkers without diminishing the real differences between them. A sharp focus can cut both ways, however; there are times when Ware's analyses may have been deepened by allowing himself to wander just a bit further afield. This is particularly true of some missed opportunities on Ware's part to engage more directly with the “usual suspects” of German idealism – Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. I'll briefly comment on each of these below.

Ware of course engages with Kant throughout – it is difficult to imagine writing such a book without doing so. But in some places a deeper engagement might have added a bit of nuance to his arguments. One example is in the question of the originality (or lack thereof) of the call for a “new mythology” in the “Oldest System Program of German Idealism.” Ware rightly indicates that, despite the anonymous author's claim to originality in this connection, the idea of creating a “new mythology” had been floating around for some years (e.g., in Herder). Ware does not discuss the author's implication that such mythopoesis should assume the systematic role

previously reserved by Kant for “practical postulates.” Attention to this dimension of the “System Program” would have raised important questions about the relationship between post-Kantian philosophy of religion and the mythopoetic tasks of Romantic imagination. It might also lend a bit more credence to the anonymous author’s claim of “originality.”

Fichte, like Kant, is referenced throughout Ware’s work. But readers familiar with Fichte’s influence may be puzzled by certain elisions or understatements of Fichte’s outsized impact on the Romantic generation. In Ware’s reading of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, for instance, Ware lucidly shows how Novalis narrates the emergence of self-constituting intuition from empirical reflection. But Novalis’ concern with this problem was shaped by years of careful engagement with early versions of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Ware does not indicate this influence as explicitly as he might have. As a result, readers who are familiar with Fichte’s influence on Novalis may feel – as I did – left hungry to know more about how Ware understands this relationship. Readers who are unfamiliar with Fichte’s influence in this regard are unlikely to know what they are missing.

Finally there is the manuscript’s relative neglect of Hegel. Ware critically engages Hegel’s understanding of Romanticism vis-a-vis the emergence of secularism. However, he leaves Hegel’s overarching rejoinder to the Romantics largely untouched. In a nutshell – and to cast the issue in terms familiar to Ware’s analysis – Hegel argues that the Romantics are asking myth to do something that it ultimately cannot achieve, since the representational and narrative forms appropriate to myth are formally incapable of attaining the degree of reflexivity that “complex wholeness” requires (only the systematic comprehension of Absolute Spirit can manage such a feat, for Hegel). To be fair, Ware gestures at this Hegelian critique and contends that treating it in detail would carry him too far afield (21, n25; see also 80, n79). He may be right – that will be for other readers of his book to decide. But while reading *Return of the Gods*, I often found myself tantalized by the possibility that Ware’s analyses might offer the basis for a rejoinder to Hegelianism that the author has left unexplored (at least for the time being).

In the last analysis, *Return of the Gods* is a significant scholarly achievement which deepens and expands our knowledge of the intellectual context of the Romantic turn to myth, indicates the shared sources and fundamental sympathies that gave birth to this tendency in both English-language and German Romantic movements, and eloquently demonstrates the enduring relevance of their theories of myth and mythopoesis. Ware’s impressively researched and sharply focused book will be a valuable resource for scholars

of the history of European philosophy and literature, as well as those interested in religion, aesthetics, and poetics.

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Laurent Guyot, *Philosophies de la création artistique*, Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2022, 306 p., ISBN 9782379242267

Dans *Philosophies de la création artistique*, Laurent Guyot propose une théorie générale de l'art, qui considère des œuvres aussi bien préhistoriques que modernes, afin de montrer que l'art est une expérience du monde grâce à laquelle le sujet se retrouve lui-même. Le pluriel dans le titre indique que cette visée théorique sera déclinée en plusieurs perspectives. L'auteur étudie la nature de la création artistique (chap. 1), le statut ontologique de l'œuvre d'art (chap. 2), la signification du beau (chap. 3), la forme (chap. 4), le langage de la nature (chap. 5), l'intuition intellectuelle (chap. 6), la vocation politique de l'art (chap. 7), le rapport entre art et philosophie (chap. 8) et enfin la tension stylistique entre deux pôles de l'art (chap. 9). L'ambition de présenter une conception totalisante de l'art se nourrit des références philosophiques fondamentales dont se sert l'auteur, spécialiste de Fichte : la pensée esthétique allemande, goethéenne par exemple, et le postkantisme fichtéen, novalisien ou encore schillérien deviennent la toile de fond à partir de laquelle émerge un livre original, précisément en raison du recours à ces sources du passé. L'ouvrage, toutefois, ne se réduit pas à une simple histoire de la philosophie, qui exposerait docilement la théorie esthétique de Schiller ou la théorie de l'intuition intellectuelle de Fichte, même si certains chapitres sont moins personnels que d'autres. Inversement, il ne s'agit pas non plus de considérer des problèmes en philosophie de l'art indépendamment d'une théorie transcendantale, laquelle sert de fondement à l'ensemble de l'analyse. L'enjeu, au contraire, est de mettre en lumière l'actualité de ces pensées allemandes trop souvent reléguées au rang de thèses anciennes n'ayant d'intérêt que pour les historiens des idées. Une telle entreprise théorique paraît d'autant plus nécessaire que, paradoxalement, les conceptions communes de l'art sont le plus souvent des vagues reformulations des thèses « romantiques ». On dit, par exemple, que l'artiste exprime ses émotions ou encore qu'elle est une créatrice. Mais ces lieux communs peuvent-ils être justifiés ?