Rewriting orthodoxy: German Romantic mythology and the aesthetics of a pantheistic education

Description

Title Rewriting orthodoxy

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Date Created 2013

Other Date 2013-10 (degree)

Subject German, German literature--18th century--History and criticism German literature--19th century--History and criticism, Romanticism--Germany, Romanticism--Religious aspects, Aesthetics, Mythology, Germanic, in literature

Extent v, 170 p.

Description In my dissertation I investigate literary representations of mythological and religious tropes in select prose German-language texts of Classicism and Early Romanticism dating from 1787-1812, and explore their use in questioning the prevailing religious views of the time. My overarching analysis has three goals: (1) to extract certain mythological traits and tropes from these texts and compare them to the original stories or figures on which they are based; (2) to explain the function of these mythological and religious rewritings within each narrative; and (3) to explain the function these rewritings have in relation to the Romantic concept of religious Bildung, especially concerning the standard Judeo-Christian monotheistic and patriarchal view of spirituality. The presence of rewritten myth has led me to focus on four prose texts in particular – Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795/96), Friedrich Schiller's Der Geisterseher (1787-89), Johann Ludwig Tieck's Der Runenberg (1804), and Ludwig Achim von Arnim's Isabella von Ägypten (1812). I argue that these texts, to varying degrees, recognize the possibility that spirituality and religion may have qualities beyond the monotheistic framework set by standard religious belief. My readings of these texts as literary forms of religious enquiry stem from the developing Romantic aesthetic theory of the period, which not only began to challenge the artistic limitations imposed by Classic aesthetic ideals, but also attempted to call into question the reason-based arguments for standard monotheistic beliefs that were prominent in the Enlightenment period.

Note Ph. D.

Note Includes bibliographical references

Note Includes vita

Note by Devin John O'Neal

Genre theses

Persistent URL https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T35B00HT

Language eng

Collection Graduate School - New Brunswick Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Organization Name Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

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