

Romantic Theory in Comparative Perspective: Schlegel's Philosophy of History and the Spanish Question

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Abstract : The Romantic movements in Spain and Germany served as turning points in European literary history, advancing cognitive-emotional ideals of the essential unity between literature, life, and the natural world in reaction against the rising tide of mechanization, urban growth, and industrial progress. This paper offers a comparative study of the literary-theoretic underpinnings of the Romantic movements in Spain and Germany, particularly with regard to the reception history of Schlegel's Romantic philosophy of history. By far one of the better-known figures of the period, Schlegel has traditionally been considered one of the principal theorists of German Romanticism, one of the first to embrace and acknowledge the more radical changes that the movement brought forth. His well-studied contributions to the German Romanticism were certainly significant domestically, but their impact on comparatively less industrialized Spain have been largely neglected, a puzzling oversight in light of Schlegel's extensive efforts in advocating for the dissemination of Spanish literature under the guise of a kind of pan-European Romanticism. Indeed, Schlegel's somewhat problematically exoticizing view of Spain as the quintessential embodiment of the spirit of Romanticism was itself enormously influential on the genesis and growth of the Spanish Romantic theory. This was especially significant considering earlier, pre-Romantic tropes of the 'black legend,' by which means Spain was demonized with even cruder essentializing, nationalistic language. By comparing Schlegel's theorizing around Spain with contributions to Romantic theory by Hispanophone writers, this paper sheds light on questions of linguistic identity and national influence from two alas infrequently compared contexts of European Romanticism.

Keywords : schlegel, Spanish romantic theory, German romanticism, romantic philosophy

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