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IMAGES OF REVOLUTION. METAPHOR, POLITICS AND HISTORY IN GERMAN EARLY ROMANTICISM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the specific uses and functions of metaphor in the political and historical writings of two major figures of German Early Romanticism, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) and Friedrich Schlegel.

It attempts to situate the texts and the metaphors they employ in the context of contemporary political and cultural developments, of which the most important is the French Revolution. The starting point of my investigation was the conviction that Novalis' and Schlegel's political writings could only be properly understood and evaluated as a part and product of the "discourse of the Revolution", namely the repertoire of literary conventions, concepts and metaphors which grew out of the revolutionary experience and informed the political debates surrounding the Revolution.

I analyse Novalis' and Schlegel's metaphorical practice within a broad theoretical perspective which draws on a number of different approaches to metaphor, and attempts to understand its function within both "rhetorical" and "mythical" discourse.

No previous study has recognized the integral part which metaphor plays in the articulation of Early Romantic political and historical theory. My thesis shows how Novalis and Schlegel appropriate and transform the central concepts and impulses of the Revolutionary Enlightenment, so as to develop new models of liberation and collectivity. It also shows how these models are themselves deeply ambiguous, and how their "progressive" impulses repeatedly mutate, via a process of metaphorical abstraction or reduction, into their opposites.

Special attention is given to the close intellectual collaboration between the two writers, and the way in which they share and exchange concepts.

This approach enables me to make connections between Novalis' and Schlegel's sense of generational, cultural and national identity. The final part of the thesis argues that their political texts written between 1795 and 1800 embody a crucial moment in the development of German nationalism, in that they begin to articulate some of its central myths.