

RETURN OF THE GODS: MYTHOLOGY IN ROMANTIC PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE. By Owen Ware. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. 220 pp.

Romanticism, in its hallmark ways of contemplating about and creating ways of thinking of the self and the ideal, is a movement that shook the intellectual traditions in the scholarly milieu of Europe in the eighteenth century. Particularly, the critical and scholarly milieu of Philosophy and Literature swung between two urges of world-making. The first urge of this period was to break away from traditional modes of symbolic signification, valuation of the world, and envisioning of life-goals for human being and society. On the other hand, the society was enamored by, and further enriched, the maze of well-known mythical motifs, characterizations, literary tropes, storylines and themes in the quest of searching for, or creating, new mythologies. Owen Ware's scholarly treatise, *Return of the Gods: Mythology in Romantic Philosophy and Literature*, is an exploration of the manner in which prominent philosopher-poets in the British and German Romantic traditions dealt with the road often taken (to reimagine and draw inspiration from existing myths) and the road not taken (to create their own mythologies, spiritual ideals and religiosities). They were surrounded by predominantly active persuasions of paths that led to different notions of being, and sought to give solutions for the spiritual, emotional, and psychological unification within a human being with the abstract (yet grounded) sense of an 'ideal' self.

Ware begins by asserting the necessity of interdisciplinarity of his book to delve into the history, and modes of generation, of ideas in the literary works of prominent British and German Romantics. In the introductory chapter, Ware places on record the Greek, Roman, Pagan, Biblical and Celtic mythical influences that influences the quest for seeking the truth, the definition of the 'ideal' (the point of culmination of all energies, actions, thoughts and life in general). Most importantly, Ware justifies the need to have an alternative-comparative trajectory of systematic exploration of the two distinct European traditions of thought to get a systematic idea of how principles and ideas were borrowed, altered, and further worked upon by succeeding generations of thinkers in the two cultures. The first analytical chapter, "Life and Ideal", predominantly explores the early works of Schiller in his tryst with mythopoetic humanization of nature in the light of Greek styles of seeking harmony of human condition with the surrounding nature. In this chapter, Ware grounds the root trajectory of inter-cultural myth-making. Schiller's work around the ancient and modern, Platonist and Primitivist theories of the world, truth and the ideal are explored by studying his adaptation of parallels and a world-making aimed at wholeness, derived from ancient Greek myths. It is in the second chapter, "Mythologies Old and New," that the tracking of the calls for a "new mythology" begins, with deep explorations of the reflections on the old, and the actions proposed in the new mythologies put to analysis. Ware's study of fragmentary works like the "Systemprogramm" and the theoretical and philosophical positions taken by Schelling, Schlegel, Winckelmann, Hamann, Herder, and Ludoviko, is a wonderful introduction to the romance of intellectual traditions in Germany with different schools of thought. Jena Romanticism and Idealism are two such interconnections that Ware uses to detail the exchange of influences, and myth-making techniques across British and German cultures.

The third chapter, "Marriages of Heaven and Hell", documents literary sensibilities and romantic efforts to seek self-fulfillment through emotional highs and internal tranquility that the British romantics like Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge proposed through their mythopoetic philosophy and aesthetic. The systematic exploration of different philosophical principles involved in the literary myth-making processes (such as principle of contraries, principle of correspondence), is the highlight of Ware's analysis from here on. It is through these principles and their reflections in different imageries across different romantic writers in these two cultures, that Ware establishes the close-knit relationship between the roles of a poet and a philosopher. The fourth chapter, "Searching

for the Blue Flower,” engages in analysis of the active efforts to realize the frame of new mythologies that German romantics like Hölderlin, Schlegel and Novalis introduced. The role of consciousness and perception in the world-making activity of mythological imagination that these writers displayed through their poetry is studied in detail by Ware. With a reference to Indian mythological influences on these romantics, Ware decodes how new mythology of the German Romantics were imbued by syncretic infusion of antiquities that surpassed cultural ancestry. The fifth chapter, “The Imageless Truth,” builds on the works of second-generation British Romantics, Keats and Shelley, to trace the nature of their romantic mythmaking projects through their landmark works. Poetry as a conduit of unraveling unseen worlds, and thereby unearthing new, unknown worlds, is a major premise followed by Ware across these poems.

Return of the Gods lives up to its name, literally. The aspect of return is appended by the simultaneous action of movement and newness that the spirit of modernity enmeshed with the Romantic philosophical and literary traditions. In this book, the endnotes are a whole saga of deeper explorations, directions for knowledge and act as the sequential building-blocks that Owen Ware relied on to return to the Romantics and build their worlds for the readers of the future. One of the most interesting features of this book that this reviewer, as a student of both literature and philosophy observed, is that it strikes a very good balance between the argumentation and analytical styles of these two disciplines. There is no overwhelming tilt of making this beautiful project a literary study or a philosophical treatise. Rather, it truly reflects a perfect marriage of sensibilities of a philosopher and a poet that the subject matter of this book demands, and that the age of romanticism had beautifully accomplished.

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CULTURE'S FUTURES: SCIENCE FICTION, FORM AND THE PROBLEM OF CULTURE.
By Eric Aronoff. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025. 291 pp.

To navigate the problem of culture, its scope and dimensions across sets of individuals, spaces, and time periods, has been a core objective of many scholars till date. Culture and its dynamics in the realm of science fiction is the fundamental issue that Eric Aronoff exhaustively explores in his 2025 book, *Culture's Futures: Science Fiction, Form and the Problem of Culture*. The most impressive element about this book is its nuanced way of introducing conceptual linkages of scholarly understandings across disciplines of literature, sociology, anthropology, biology, genetic engineering. As said by Aronoff himself, this study seeks to examine the interdisciplinarity of science fiction as a genre to understand multiple representations of culture, or cultures, and/or differences. The ‘genre-tic engineering,’ that he lauds Octavia Butler for performing in one of the chapters in this book, is a very timely word to describe the steady changes in the image of science fiction. From being typecasted as a pulp-fiction unworthy of academic interest, to gaining pace in the twentieth century as a leading genre of revisionary literature, science fiction’s growth has become undeniably important in academic circles. This is mapped beautifully by Aronoff in the introductory chapter, where he introduces the reader to the social relevance of the science fiction imaginaries as discourses of serious critique regarding various circles and social movements in the societies as time went by. A premise as sound as this is established by Aronoff to further expand upon how anthropology as a discipline interweaved with the imaginary spaces of science fiction to provide alternative solutions, suggestions and create different worlds than the ones known and real. This enabled science fiction writers to navigate debates of power struggles, domination, and systemic othering in the societies.