



## Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840

By Thomas Pfau

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**Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1790–1840** By Thomas Pfau

Thomas Pfau reinterprets the evolution of British and German Romanticism as a progress through three successive dominant moods, each manifested in the "voice" of an historical moment. Drawing on a multifaceted philosophical tradition ranging from Kant to Hegel to Heidegger?incorporating as well the psychosocial analyses of Freud, Benjamin, and Adorno?Pfau develops a new understanding of the Romantic writer's voice as the formal encryption of a complex cultural condition.

Pfau focuses on three specific paradigms of emotive experience: paranoia, trauma, and melancholy. Along the trajectory of Romantic thought paranoia characterizes the disintegration of traditional models of causation and representation during the French Revolution; trauma, the radical political, cultural, and economic restructuring of Central Europe in the Napoleonic era; and melancholy, the dominant post-traumatic condition of stalled, post-Napoleonic history both in England and on the continent.

*Romantic Moods* positions emotion as a "climate of history" to be interpretively recovered from the discursive and imaginative writing in which it is objectively embodied. Pfau's ambitious study traces the evolution of Romantic interiority by exploring the deep-seated reverberations of historical change as they become legible in new discursive and conceptual strategies and in the evolving formal-aesthetic construction and reception of Romantic literature. In establishing this relationship between mood and voice, Pfau moves away from the conventional understanding of emotion as something "owned" or exclusively attributable to the individual and toward a theory of mood as fundamentally intersubjective and deserving of broader consideration in the study of Romanticism.

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Review

Without a doubt, the most advanced restatement of the nature of feeling that I have encountered. Stunning in its mix of theoretical approaches, integration of historical context, and attention to a range of primary materials, both English and German.

(Alan Liu, University of California, Santa Barbara)

A timely study.

(*BARS Bulletin and Review*)

Makes an original and compelling case.

(A. C. Goodson *Studies in Romanticism*)

Pfau offers interesting and fruitful readings.

(Matthew Bell *Colloquia Germanica*)

Pfau has introduced a new analytical category into literary studies, embedded it in a rich tradition of philosophical and theoretical speculation, and... laid the groundwork for future studies.

(George S. Williamson *German Quarterly*)

Pfau's aims... are wide-ranging and challenging, and his critical method is interesting.

(*Year's Work in English Studies*)

Thomas Pfau is to be congratulated for this erudite, insightful, and provocative attempt to write a history of the feelings that shaped and gave substance to English and German romanticism.

(Arnd Bohm *Seminar: Journal of Germanic Studies*)

*Romantic Moods* both succeeds on its own terms and offers an important model for those seeking an alternative to the historicist methods of interpretation that have dominated Romantic studies for the last two decades.

(Nicholas Halmi [www.erudit.org](http://www.erudit.org))

About the Author

**Thomas Pfau** is a professor of English and Germanic languages at Duke University.

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