

Despite its widely acknowledged importance in and beyond the thought of the Romantic period, the distinctive concept of the symbol articulated by such writers as Goethe and F. W. J. Schelling in Germany, and S. T. Coleridge in England, has defied adequate historical explanation. In contrast to previous scholarship, Nicholas Halmi's study provides such an explanation by relating the content of Romantic symbolist theory—often criticized as irrationalist—to the cultural needs of its time. Because its genealogical method eschews a single disciplinary perspective, this study is able to examine the Romantic concept of the symbol in a broader intellectual context than previous scholarship, a context ranging chronologically from classical antiquity to the present and encompassing literary criticism and theory, aesthetics, semiotics, theology, metaphysics, natural philosophy, astronomy, poetry, and the origins of landscape painting. The concept is thus revealed to be a specifically modern response to modern discontents, neither reverting to pre-modern modes of thought nor secularizing Christian theology, but countering Enlightenment dualisms with means bequeathed by the Enlightenment itself.

Nicholas Halmi is Associate Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Washington, Seattle.

Jacket illustration: Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Tischbein, *Goethe am Fenster seiner Wohnung in Rom*, 1787 (watercolour; 415 x 266 mm). Reproduced by permission of the Freies Deutsches Hochstift/Frankfurter Goethe-Museum, Frankfurt am Main.