

Judaism and Hellenism

by Friedrich Hansen (December 2017)



Noah damning Ham, 19th c., Ivan Stepanovitch Ksenofontov

The irritating fact about modernity is that romanticism, with its medieval nostalgia, won't die.

The West, for all its cyber intelligence and digital empowerment, seems incapable of letting the medieval world go. Instead, romanticism still rules over the Western mind; its extended culture of fantasy and virtual productions cannot but rely for inspiration on the guilt culture of medieval times. It is worth remembering that European romanticism succeeded

Christian Hellenism after the French Revolution and this link is alive as it rebounds in the recent wave of “me toos” and calls for an end of the sexual revolution.

It was Thomas Mann who reduced romanticism in his 1951 novel to a narrative of the “Holy Sinner” dealing with the self-addicted individual. The romantics were keen to hide this under the metaphor of the innocent plant—firmly rooted in the ground rather than in religious transcendence—searching for identity below instead of the open space of the universe. It is important to realize that while the human imagination can cope with temporal limitlessness, as with monotheism, the notion of unlimited space is an entirely different matter. For most of us it is truly mindboggling and may even induce vertigo, which might be behind recent calls for “safe spaces.” Yet vertigo used to be the romantic *kick*. Surely, this was the consequence of the descent of the Enlightenment from the auditive paradigm to the visual experience. Unless we reverse this course and embrace religion again, as it is now happening beyond the Western hemisphere, we won’t get rid of romanticism and the Western individual won’t get back its self-control.

Meanwhile, the concept of the “The Holy Sinner” runs through most of modern romantic fantasy such as Tolkien’s