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Sympathy and the State in the Romantic Era: Systems, State Finance, and the Shadows of Futurity

Robert Mitchell

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Sympathy and the State in the Romantic Era explores a fascinating connection between two seemingly unrelated Romantic-era discourses, outlining the extent to which eighteenth and early nineteenth century theories of sympathy were generated by crises of state finance. Through readings of authors such as David Hume, Adam Smith, William Wordsworth, and P.B. Shelley, this volume establishes the ways in which crises of state finance encouraged the development of theories of sympathy capable of accounting for both the fact of "social systems" as well as the modes of emotional communication by means of which such systems bound citizens to one another.

Employing a methodology that draws on the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann, Michel Serres, and Giovanni Arrighi, as well as Gilles Deleuze’s theories of time and affect, this book argues that eighteenth and early nineteenth century philosophies of sympathy emerged as responses to financial crises. Individual chapters focus on specific texts by David Hume, Adam Smith, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Ann Yearsley, William Wordsworth, and P.B. Shelley, but Mitchell also draws on periodicals, pamphlets, and parliamentary hearings to make the argument that Romantic era theories of sympathy developed new discourses about social systems intended both to explain, as well as contain, the often disruptive effects of state finance and speculation.

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