



Idleness, Contemplation and the Aesthetic, 1750-1830 (Cambridge Studies in Romanticism)

Richard Adelman

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Reconstructing the literary and philosophical reaction to Adam Smith's dictum that man is a labouring animal above and before all else, this study explores the many ways in which Romantic writers presented idle contemplation as the central activity in human life. By contrasting the British response to Smith's political economy with that of contemporary German Idealists, Richard Adelman also uses this consideration of the importance of idleness to Romantic aesthetics to chart the development of a distinctly British idealism in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Exploring the work of Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Friedrich Schiller, William Cowper, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mary Wollstonecraft and many of their contemporaries, this study pinpoints a debate over human activity and capability taking place between 1750 and 1830, and considers its social and political consequences for the cultural theory of the early nineteenth century.

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