

A micro-ebook reformatted from

Symbiosis: a Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations

Volume 1.1

Robert D Richardson Jr

Liberal Platonism and Transcendentalism: Shaftesbury, Schleiermacher, Emerson

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

FOR GUIDANCE ON USE OF THIS EBOOK PLEASE SCROLL TO PAGE 2

PUBLICATION DATA

© Symbiosis 1997, 2007 all rights reserved

The Author has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in SYMBIOSIS Volume 1.1 (April 1997) pp 1–20

2nd electronic edition published in 2007 by Humanities-Ebooks LLP

<http://www.humanities-ebooks.co.uk>

Tirril Hall, Tirril, Penrith CA10 2JE

Essays published in Symbiosis are subsequently digitized for the benefit of the Author (80%) and the Journal (20%)

READING OPTIONS

To use the toolbar this Ebook should be read in default view.

To navigate use the hyperlinked 'Bookmarks' or thumbnails at the left of the screen.

To search, click on the binocular symbol in the toolbar.

Use <CTRL+L> to enlarge the page to full screen.

LICENCE AND PERMISSIONS

This ebook is licensed for reading on a particular computer.

The original purchaser may license the same work for a second computer by applying to support@humanities-ebooks.co.uk with proof of purchase.

It is permissible to print a watermarked copy of the book for your own use.

ISSN: 1362-7902

A cumulative index of Symbiosis essays and reviews is online at

<http://www.symbiosisonline.org.uk>

ROBERT D. RICHARDSON, JR

Liberal Platonism and Transcendentalism: Shaftesbury, Schleiermacher, Emerson.

1. THE TRADITION OF LIBERAL PLATONISM

When we understand American Transcendentalism as a reaction against Unitarianism, or when we see it against the larger background of American religion, especially Calvinism, or when we see it as a protest against the prevailing utilitarianism of the early nineteenth century, even a sympathetic observer will see Transcendentalism as an essentially local and short lived movement, a back eddy rather than a main current of American thought. But while Transcendentalism appears as a side issue in the history of Puritanism or as a brief time-out from the march of the Enlightenment toward positivism, or even as a late-breaking fourth wave of international Romanticism, there is still one long and important tradition in religion and philosophy in which American Transcendentalism plays a central and even a continuing role. This is the tradition of Liberal Platonism, running from Plato through Neoplatonism and the Christian Humanism of the Renaissance to the Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century—Whichcote, Cudworth, Henry More, and John Norris—to Shaftesbury, and through him to Herder, Wieland, Goethe, Lessing, and, most importantly, Schleiermacher. American Transcendentalism draws on all these sources, both directly and through such English writers as Coleridge, Carlyle, and Sterling. It is the same line of thought that will re-appear later in the Irish Renaissance, especially in Yeats, and in the work of William James, Santayana, Dean Inge, Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne.

Platonism is, as Kathleen Raine has observed, a 'continuous tradition like Christianity or Buddhism'. This is especially true of what I am calling Liberal Platonism, which is the small group of religious and philosophical ideas which came to a nineteenth century fruition in Transcendentalism and which has continued on to inform what is usually called the liberal religious movement of the last hundred and fifty years.¹

¹ *Thomas Taylor the Platonist*, ed K. Raine and G. M. Harper (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), 11. John Fisher, writing in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 3: 506, says 'the liberal religion of the last several hundred years is rooted in the Platonic theology.'