

Lecture 2: Romanticism in History

1) Romanticism and Modernity: A Broad Outline

- a) The Western Tradition**
- b) Art and Literature in Modern Culture:
A Systematic Approach**

2) Romanticism: Revolution or Synthesis?

- a) The Notion of “Paradigm Shift”**
- b) Key Features of Change**

3) Romanticism in History

- a) The Importance of Romanticism**
- b) Romantic Contexts**

Romanticism as a Period of Historical Change:

[Y]ou need to think of Romantic literature not as escapist in the way the term ‘Romantic’ sometimes suggests, but as literature that tries passionately to come to terms with the modern world as it emerges through a series of wrenching changes [...] [W]hat we get in the literature of the period is a range of competing, arguing, contending voices rather than a series of common assumptions that all share and that can be neatly summarized.

(O’Flinn 2001, 3)

American Revolution (1776-1783)
French Revolution (1787-1799)
Industrial Revolution (c. 1750-1850 and beyond)

1) Romanticism and Modernity

a) The Western Tradition

Antiquity (c 500 B.C. – 500 A.D.):

mimetic and pragmatic criteria begin to dominate the production and reception of art and literature

⇒ the traditional Western attitude

The Middle Ages (500 A.D. – 1500 A.D.):

break in continuity because of cultural difference perceived as 'poverty' in the Renaissance period

Modernity (1500 A.D. - ????):

⇒ modern (Western) attitudes
marked by an ongoing negotiation of

traditional "objective", i.e. mimetic and pragmatic
dimensions of cultural meaning

on the one hand and

modern "subjective", i.e. expressive and reflexive
dimensions of cultural meaning

on the other

b) Art and Literature in Modern Culture: A Systematic Approach (c. 1500-2015)

traditional criteria for art and literature
(based on the ideal of objective truth)



mimetic criteria----->
pragmatic criteria----->
expressive criteria----->
reflexive criteria----->



modern criteria for art and literature
(based on the emerging interface of
subjectivity and mediality)

Modernization: Renaissance Romanticism Postmodernism
Compensation: Neo-Classicism Modernism

----->
1500 1660 1800 1900 2000

The Dialectics of Modern Literature:

Modernization

vs.

Compensation

Renaissance/ Early
Modern (thesis)

Neo-Classicism
(antithesis)

['Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes']

↓
Romanticism (synthesis)

↓
['Aufhebung': to raise, to preserve, to cancel]

↓
modern understanding of literature as
imaginative writing

↓
continuation of dialectics on new footing:

Romanticism (thesis)

↓
Modernism (synthesis)

Realism (antithesis)

↓
'Crystalization'

↓
Postmodernism

2) Romanticism: Revolution or Synthesis

a) The Notion of Paradigm Shift

Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 1962/1970
as applied to 18th century literary history in Furst 2002:

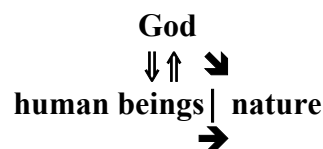
This hypothesis envisages the emergence of the new from the familiar via a gradual change of emphasis that ultimately leads to the modification of the entire structure when an innovative paradigm comes to replace the previously established one. [...] In the analysis of paradigm shift, it is not the terminus a quo or the terminus ad quem or even the chronology itself that matters, but rather the nature, direction, and main stages of the transformational process. (3)

Such a paradigm shift occurs in the metamorphosis of the eighteenth-century model in lyric poetry into the very different Romantic ideal. [...] The paradigm shift was prefigured in the prose of the later eighteenth century, possibly because prose was the genre least subject to the prescriptions of neoclassical usage, and therefore least tied by tradition and convention. (15)

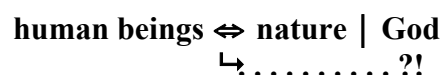
The paradigm shift [...] entails the supplanting of one favored mode of discourse by another very different one. Its total impact amounts to a break in style. But it takes place [...] through a gradual erosion and emendation of the older model, not through a sudden dissonant rupture. The ultimate assertion and emendation of the new paradigm is tantamount to a revolution, yet it is also part of a continuum; though a decisive and perceptible step, it is nevertheless one stage in a process of continuous change. (17)

b) Key Features of Change

The Traditional View



The Modern View



Poetic Consequences (cf. Siskin 1988: "The Lyric Turn")

hegemony of the external	→	interiorization
description	→	interpretation
seeing	→	perception
transparency	→	medi(t)ation
denotation	→	connotation
personification/allegory	→	symbol
metonymy	→	metaphor
message	→	meaning
rhetoric	→	'literariness'
addressing an audience	→	addressing the scene, an object, it-/oneself

>> a new author position / a new reader position

>>> a new mode of communication

3) Romanticism in History

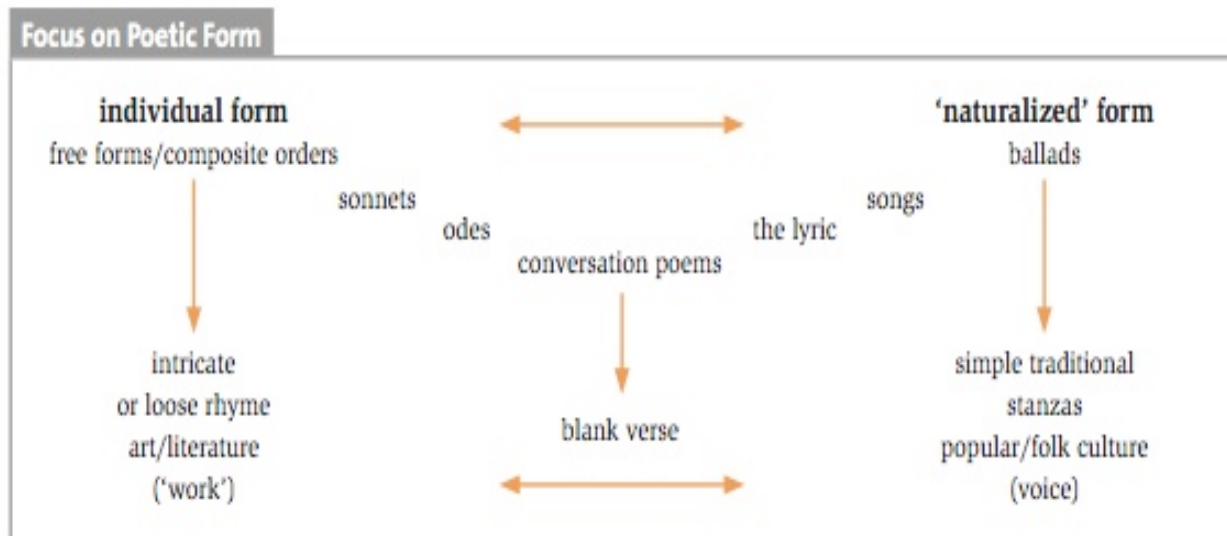
a) The Importance of Romanticism

Basic Problem:

How can individual subjective experience claim cultural authority/validity?

Romantic Solutions/Romantic Conflicts:

Processes of Naturalization	↔	Prozesses of Individualization
> integration of subjectivity and culture (poetic traditions of iambic pentameter/blank verse; prose/narrative fiction)		> fragmentation: the norm of originality/innovation leads to formal experiment/defamiliarization/difficulty
> the Romantic construction of "the People"/"the Nation" (ballads/songs)		> the emergence and evolution of art and literature as special spheres



(Reinfandt 2012, 52)

Siskin 1988:

I have turned from the concepts of periods, for it has come to carry an assumption of abrupt beginnings and endings that has led almost all critics to write Romanticism off as to the second or third decade of the 19th century. However, that was precisely the time at which the constructs and strategies of Romantic texts became normal for the entire culture, not only constituting the new formal and thematic criteria for literariness but also – as the newly charged literary institution took up the cultural work of defining 'real language' and the 'common man' – transforming the prosaic self into what we now think of as the modern subject.

(Siskin 1988, 9-10)

Chandler 2009:

In the decades that straddle the turn of the eighteenth century, the categories of 'aesthetics' and 'poetics' both underwent serious transformation in ways that still matter to the early twenty-first century. [...] This is a period [...] that is often strongly identified with the emergence of what might be called a cultural idiom, a whole way of being in the word, one sometimes understood in contradistinction to the 'classical' idiom.

(Chandler 2009, 2)

b) Romantic Contexts

A. Transforming Polity and Nation

(revolution, war, democracy, women, empire, slavery, policing, law, utopianism)

B. Reordering Social and Private Worlds

(religion, sensibility, poverty, domesticity, industrialization, class, land, education, medicine)

C. Culture, Consumption and the Arts

(consumerism, viewing, publishing, prints, popular culture, theatre, design, music, painting, architecture, poetry, prose, novels)

D. Emerging Knowledges

(enlightenment, political economy, natural philosophy, antiquarianism, mythology, exploration, history, psychology, language, literary theory)

(cf. McCalman, ed. 1999)

[Eugène Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People* (1830)]

[William Turner, *The Slave Ship* (1840)]

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