

Romanticism

Lecture 3: Romantic Perspectives

1) Definitions of Romanticism Revisited

2) Romantic Perspectives

- a) Enlightenment and Romanticism in Modern Culture
- b) Beyond Literature and Popular Culture

1) Definitions of Romanticism Revisited

Pre-Romanticism

cultural movement in Europe from about the 1740s onward that preceded and presaged the artistic movement known as Romanticism (*q.v.*). Chief among these trends was a shift in public taste away from the grandeur, austerity, nobility, idealization, and elevated sentiments of Neoclassicism or Classicism toward simpler, more sincere, and more natural forms of expression. This emphasis reflected the tastes of the growing middle class, who found the refined and elegant art forms patronized by aristocratic society to be artificial and overly sophisticated; the bourgeoisie favoured more realistic artistic vehicles that were more emotionally accessible.

(Encyclopædia Britannica 2002)

Romanticism

attitude or intellectual orientation that characterized many works of literature, painting, music, architecture, criticism, and historiography in Western civilization over a period from the late 18th to the mid-19th century. Romanticism can be seen as a rejection of the precepts of order, calm, harmony, balance, idealization, and rationality that typified Classicism in general and late 18th-century Neo-classicism in particular. It was also to some extent a reaction against the Enlightenment and against 18th-century rationalism and physical materialism in general. Romanticism emphasized the individual, the subjective, the irrational, the imaginative, the personal, the spontaneous, the emotional, the visionary, and the transcendental.

Among the characteristic attitudes of Romanticism were the following: a deepened appreciation of the beauties of nature; a general exaltation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect; a turning in upon the self and a heightened examination of human personality and its moods and mental potentialities; a preoccupation with the genius, the hero, and the exceptional figure in general, and a focus on his passions and inner struggles; a new view of the artist as a supremely individual creator, whose creative spirit is more important than strict adherence to formal rules and traditional procedures; an emphasis upon imagination as a gateway to transcendent experience and spiritual truth; an obsessive interest in folk culture, national and ethnic cultural origins, and the medieval era; and a predilection for the exotic, the remote, the mysterious, the weird, the occult, the monstrous, the diseased, and even the satanic.

(*Encyclopædia Britannica* 2002)

+ Romanticism as “a cultural idiom, a whole way of being in the world, one sometimes understood in contradistinction to the ‘classical’ idiom.”

(Chandler 2009, 2)

Marakand R. Paranjape, *Body Offerings*. New Delhi: Rupa, 2013.

“Reading each other’s books, watching each other’s movies, learning each other’s tastes in music, poetry, art – or sharing each other’s hobbies – all this takes time,” said Nayan softly. “And we usually think of these as shortcuts. We want the other to know us ‘instantly’ through them. But that is a fallacy – an illusion.”

“Bingo,” said Ashok.

Nayan stared at the waning sun and said, “What then, is the answer, darling?”

“Pirsig [Robert Maynard Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, 1974] says that reality is like quality,” he said. “It is not inter-subjective in the sense that several observers will see the ‘same’ thing, but it is inter-subjective-objective because it fuses the subject and object into a third category of being.”

“How?”

“Try to visualize it. Here is a cup. That is your object. Then here are you – you are the subject. Now in classical Western epistemology, the two are always separate. You, the perceiver, cannot *be* the cup, which is the object of your perception. So there is a dichotomy between the perceiver and perceived, between subject and object.”

Nayan nodded. “Yes, I see that. It seems the way we normally operate.”

“Now that is what leads to the problem,” he said. “You say the cup is white, I say it is slightly off-white. No two persons will see the same colours.”

Nayan caught on. “Worse, coming to our original issue, I say ‘This is a pretty cup,’ and you reply, ‘But its ear is not designed for a good grip.’”

“Ah!”

“And, pray, what might that exclamation mean?” Nayan’s eyes danced mischievously.

Ashok smiled. “It means that you’ve come to the heart of the issue. Pirsig talks of two ideas of quality – the classic and the romantic. The classic, according to him, considers the underlying form of things. To that extent, it is also concerned with function, utility and purpose. The romantic, on the other hand, looks at the surface texture, the appearance, feel, or look of things. It’s about beauty more than utility.” (20f.)

At last she said, touching him lightly, separating him from her, “Patience ... time ... the unfolding cannot happen all at once ...”

He blinked, uncomprehending at first, then remembered where they had left off in their conversation.

Time, time, time, too true, but what then of quality? he wondered.

In quality it is not just the subject and the object that lose their boundaries, but time too, becomes amorphous, shimmering, tottering uncertainly. In quality, there *is* no time because time is only where there is a separate self – the ego. Outside of that, we are all in eternity, or to put it in a different way, at each moment, our temporality intersects secretly with eternity. It is up to us to choose to inhabit the space of temporality or eternity. The ideas flowed effortlessly in his mind while he, as if in a trance, held her to himself, till she interjected, “All this requires too much reflection, analysis, and ultimately, belief.” (33)

2) Romantic Perspectives

a) Enlightenment and Romanticism in Modern Culture

Enlightenment		Romanticism	
analytic		synthetic	
- reflexive		+ reflexive	
↓	X	↓	
technology	science	art/literature	popular culture
analytic	analytic	synthetic	synthetic
- reflexive	+ reflexive	+ reflexive	- reflexive

(cf. McGann 1983, 1-17, 10 and Reinfandt 2003, 27-52, 39)

b) Beyond Literature and Popular Culture

Painting

- Neoclassicist Academic painting (cf. Sir Joshua Reynolds, President of the Royal Academy, *Discourses*, 1769-1790): strict hierarchy from 'history painting' in 'grand style' showing heroic figures from epics, mythology, biblical or national history through ('grand') portraiture to landscape, genre and still-life painting.
- Romantic inversion of hierarchy because of dominant interest in nature in terms of subjectivity/perception and objectivity/ scientific exploration (landscapes, clouds) on the one hand and a more dynamic sense of history on the other. Where mythological orientations persist, they become highly individualized (W. Blake).

(cf. Vaughan 1994)

Swarming around the history paintings and the grand portrait of a Prince are pictures of beggars, flowers, waterfalls, witches, landscapes, birds, dogs, and horses. Modestly sized portraits of eminently unheroic people – women in fancy hats, humble prelates, and country gentry – jostle at the edges of Opie's and Northcote's history paintings, and hover beneath Reynold's huge canvas.

(Hallet 1999, 252)

- > an inversion of the official hierarchy, underlined by the mixed audience more interested in entertainment than art
- > the Romantic modernization of the Western understanding of art and representation
- > the Sublime (cf. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1757) vs. interest in detail and nature as such.

Music

- before c. 1800, music was generally considered secondary to language, i.e. pleasing to the senses but devoid of the aesthetic and moral significance of representational art forms such as poetry or painting
- Romantic inversion of hierarchies (cf. Neubauer 1983): instrumental music as the incarnation of what came to be known as 'absolute music' (cf. Dahlhaus 1989) which in turn was considered the purest form of art
- the first instance in a sequence of battles about the non-representational potential of (modern) art
- Britain conspicuously unproductive in this respect, but contributed through commercialism, craftsmanship and consumption

(cf. Ehrlich/McVeigh 1999)

Politics

- Enlightenment cosmopolitanism based on Western tradition
→ Romantic universalism/utopianism in national cultures
+ individualizing tendencies
(Romanticism as ‘the problem child of the Enlightenment’)
- radicalism vs. conservatism and the French Revolution
- democracy vs. elitism
- new ‘transcendental’ points of reference:
 - the self (subjectivity/individuality)
 - humanity, ‘the people’, community
 - the nation/the state
 - the unity of nature
 - history

Romanticism was a revolutionary movement that rallied round a promise which was bound to be broken: the promise of the success of revolutions deriving their philosophy from the concept of natural man. Romanticism represented and acted out the full predicament of those who created the goddess of liberty, put a flag in her hands and followed her only to find that she led them into an ambush: the ambush of reality. It is this predicament which explains the two faces of Romanticism: its exploratory adventurousness and its morbid self-indulgence. For pure romantics the two most un-romantic things in the world were firstly to accept life as it was, and secondly to succeed in changing it.

(Berger [1959] 2002, 58f.)

Science

	Romantic Science	Modern Science
S/O-relation	sympathy, empathy	objectivity, distance
motivation/goal	admiration, education	domination, applicability
method	experiment as dialogue human perception synthesis, understanding	experiment as interrogation instrumental procedures analysis, explanation
science system	transdisciplinarity	interdisciplinarity

(cf. Köchy 1997, 214-390 and Reinfandt 2003, 235-255, 247;
see also Gloy 1995: scientific thought vs. holistic thought))

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