

Romanticism

This lecture course provides an outline of the Romantic period in British literature (c. 1770-1832). Particular attention will be paid to the processes of canon-building that established the Romantic period as a cornerstone of cultural and aesthetic modernization in spite of the fact that only a small proportion of the works produced in this era can actually be called 'Romantic' in any definable sense of the term. Largely neglected or scorned in its own time, what came to be known as 'Romantic' art and literature pointed to the future: in many ways the aesthetic paradigm of Romanticism is still with us, and the course of lectures will present a systematic account of its basic tenets and its importance for modern culture at large.

Please note that the course of lectures is based on

Christoph Reinfandt, *Englische Romantik: Eine Einführung*. Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2008
and

Christoph Reinfandt, "Romanticism". In: Martin Middeke et al., eds., *English and American Studies: Theory and Practice*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2012: 46-55,

which may serve as background reading.

Lecture 1: What is "Romantic"?

1) Course Overview

2) Definitions and Connotations

- a) 'Romantic' in Everyday Usage
- b) The Historical Emergence of the Adjective 'Romantic'
- c) Classicism and Romanticism

3) Key Scenes of Romanticism

1) Course Overview

Part 1: Introduction

23rd April Lecture 1 What Is 'Romantic'?

30th April Lecture 2 Romanticism in History

7th May Lecture 3 Romantic Perspectives

[14th May Ascension Day]

Part 2: Studying Romanticism

21st May Lecture 4 English Romanticism

[28th May: Whitsun Break / 4th July: Corpus Christi]

11th June Lecture 5 Revisions

Part 3: Genres of Romantic Literature

18th June Lecture 6 Romantic Poetry I:
Ballads and Songs

25th June Lecture 7 Romantic Poetry II:
Sonnets, Odes and 'Composite Orders'

2nd July Lecture 8 Romantic Fiction

9th July Lecture 9 Romantic Drama

Part 4: Widening the Frame

16th July Lecture 10 Romanticism and Modern Culture

23rd July Written Exam

2) Definitions and Connotations

a) 'Romantic' in Everyday Usage

- intense emotional experiences (love & landscape; longing)
- wildness and cosiness
- intimacy and flamboyance
- nature and fantasy

Dictionary of Contemporary English (1981):

- 1 belonging to or suggesting ROMANCE ['a story of love, adventure, strange happenings, etc., often set in a distant time or place, whose events are happier or grander or more exciting than those of real life']
- 2 *sometimes derog* fanciful; not practical; showing [too much] liking for dreams of love, adventure etc.

b) The Historical Emergence of the Adjective 'Romantic'

Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd ed. (1989):

- 1 Of the nature of, having the qualities of, romance in respect of form and content [1659ff.]
- 2 Of a fabulous or fictitious character; having no foundation in fact [1667ff.]
- 3 Of projects, etc.: Fantastic, extravagant, quixotic; going beyond what is customary or practical [1671ff.]
- 4 Having a bent or tendency towards romance; readily influenced by the imagination [1700ff.] Tending towards, characterized by, romance as a basis or principle of literature or art (Opposed to *classical*.) [...] Hence used of persons connected with, or things relating to, literature, art, etc. of this kind [1812ff.]
- 5 Characterized or marked by, invested or environed with, romance or imaginative appeal [1666ff.]

c) Classicism vs. Romanticism

Classicism	Romanticism
angular, geometric	variety and complexity
simple, plain	decorated, elaborate
conservative	individual
practical	imaginative
basic shapes and colors	colorful
organized	spontaneous, lively
sense of perfection	brought unrest to mind
few or no flaws	lots of contrasts
lots of right angles	“heard noise in the picture”
sleek, cold, modern	emotional, bold, artistic
ordinary objects	focus on whole not parts
unemotional	associated with particular time or place

(cf. Stark 1994, 28)

Perhaps the central distinctive feature of romanticism was the recognition and assertion of the importance of the imagination in our intellectual make-up. We are creatures defined and marked-off from other animals by our reason, as prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment had argued, but we are also at least equally defined by our imagination.

(Egan 1994, 17)

Against an enemy, I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts,
Thus might we wear perhaps an hour away,
Ascending at loose distance each from each,
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band -
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor had I time to ask the cause of this,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash. I looked about, and lo,
The moon stood naked in the heavens at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach.
Meanwhile, the moon looked down upon this shew
In single glory, and we stood, the mist
Touching our very feet; and from the shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, streams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
The soul, the imagination of the whole.

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely mountain when the scene
Had passed away, and it appeared to me
The perfect image of a mighty mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an under-presence,
The sense of God, or whatsoe'er is dim
Or vast in its own being - above all,
One function of such mind had Nature there
Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime:
That domination which she oftentimes
Exerts upon the outward face of things,
So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,

Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervades them so,
That even the grossest minds must see and hear,
And cannot chuse but feel. The power which these
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express
Resemblance - in the fullness of its strength
Made visible - a genuine counterpart
And brother of the glorious faculty
Which higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With all the objects of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Like transformation, for themselves create
A like existence, and, when'er it is
Created for them, catch it by an instinct.
Them the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt. They build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouse them - in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
But quickened, roused, and made thereby more fit
To hold communion with the invisible world.
Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are powers; and hence the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs - the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions; hence religion, faith,
And endless occupation for the soul,
Whether discursive or intuitive;
Hence sovereignty within and peace at will,
Emotion which best foresight need not fear,
Most worthy then of trust when most intense;
Hence cheerfulness in every act of life;
Hence truth in moral judgements; and delight
That fails not, in the external universe.

Bibliography Lecture 1:

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