

Lecture 6: Neoclassicism and Romanticism

1) Authorship and Authority in the 18th Century

2) Towards Romanticism

3) Romantic Authority

Early Modern Authorship:

Inspiration [< God]

(*poeta vates*)

⇒ Utterance ⇒ subjective/emancipatory elements

▲ ▼

Imitation [< Tradition < God]

(*poeta doctus, poeta faber*)

⇒ Composition ⇒ normative/compensatory elements

1) Authorship and Authority in the 18th Century

The problem is how to assume authority without simply doing so, how to both claim and disclaim authority so as to exert power without being crushed by guilt. [...] [The problem can be solved by creating] the illusion of a free-standing discourse, authorized by its fidelity to experience, its self-circumscribing formal coherence, and [...] its effortless issuing from a personal source that at once grounds that discourse and is unproblematically expressed by it.

(Bogel 1987: 198/206)

Alexander Pope, *Essay on Criticism* (1709)

First follow Nature, and your judgement frame
By her just standard, which is still the same;
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
Life, force, and beauty must to all impart,
At once the source, and end, and test of art.
(Part I, ll 67-73)

Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are Nature still, but Nature methodized;
Nature, like liberty, is but restrained
By the same laws which herself ordained.
Hear how learn'd Greece her useful rules indites,
When to repress and when indulge our flights:
[...]
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem;
To copy Nature is to copy them.
(Part I, ll 88-93 u. 139f.)

'Tis with our judgements as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
[...]
Authors are partial to their wit, 'tis true,
But are not critics to their judgement too?
(Part I, Z. 9f. u. 17f.)

Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
Most have the seeds of judgement in their mind:
Nature affords at least a glimmering light;
The lines, though touched but faintly, are drawn right.
(Part I, ll 19-22)

Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defense,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense.
If once right reason drives that cloud away,
Truth breaks upon us with resistless day.
Trust not yourself: but your defects to know,
Make use of every friend – and every foe.
(Part II, ll 210-214)

In wit, as nature, what affects our hearts
Is not the exactness of peculiar parts;
[...]
No single parts unequally surprise,
All comes united to the admiring eyes.
[...]
Avoid extremes; and shun the fault of such
Who still are pleased too little or too much.
(Part II, ll 243f., 249f., 384f.)

Poets, like painters, thus unskilled to trace
The naked nature and the living grace,
with gold and jewels cover every part,
And hide with ornaments their want of art.
True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed;
[...]
But true expression, like the unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon;
It gilds all objects, but it alters none.
Expression is the dress of thought, and still
Appears more decent as more suitable.
(Part II, ll 293-298 u. 315-319)

True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learned to dance.
(Part II, ll 362f.)

The couplet is able to produce a sense of closed order, not only because of the repeated uniformity of the rhyme scheme, but also because each couplet anticipates a closure in which the second line answers the first. [...] The couplet is fundamental to the operation by which Augustan poetry produces a position for the subject. Although the success of the Romantic revolution for us now tends to make all Augustan poetry seem stylized and artificial, nevertheless the couplet positively encourages rather than impedes the aim of transparency. [...] Relative to the Renaissance verse forms which preceded it, Augustan poetry eradicates complex rhyme schemes in favour of the couplet. [...] [T]he very uniformity of the couplet, constantly repeated, tends to make it invisible except as a sign for continuation [...] In Augustan practice meaning is developed along the syntagmatic chain across the individual couplets and down the paragraph. In this respect meaning is developed in independence from the verse form, each couplet being treated as a bead strung along the syntagmatic chain which runs through it.
(Easthope 1983: 119f.)

[F]rom the proper disposition of single sounds results that harmony that adds force to reason, and gives grace to sublimity; that shackles attention, and governs passion.

Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* No. 88 (Jan 19, 1751)

Functions of Literature

modernization: ↻ Renaissance ↻ Romanticism ↻ Postmodernism
re-traditionalization: ↻ Neo-Classicism ↻ Modernism
-----1500-----1750-----1800-----1900-----2000----->

Modernization	vs.	[Re-Traditionalization]
the influx of subjectivity resulting in/counterbalanced by poetic form a) as imported from (oral) trad. b) as 'liberated' by writing/printing (innovation, defamiliarization)	vs.	the persistence of a longing for objectivity resulting in the emergence of prose as a flexible, open-form signifying practice which seemingly maintains the clarity and control of direct interaction in writing
leading to reflexivity/intransparency		leading to an evasion of reflexivity/ the illusion of transparency

Verse is not removed from the configuration of signifying practices that make up communication. It is just that its extension is restricted. The domain of signifying practices is remapped. Prose appears and claims a territory of its own.

[P]rose withholds itself from view [...] it becomes identified with the linguistic substratum so that whereas one recognizes that it emerges relatively late, it presents itself as prior to verse or any specific discourse. It can thus claim a foundational role and functions as the ground of reference, a sort of degree-zero of language for all further elaboration. [Thus,] verse is seen as developmentally second. But we know it to be developmentally first. Well then, if verse is first *and* verse is second, where is prose? [...] Prose is meant to have no place; prose does not happen. Prose is what assigns place.

(Kittay/Godzich 1987: ivii/197)

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] Oxford: Clarendon 1894.

[“On the Abuse of Words”]

Since wit and fancy find easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, figurative speeches and allusion in language will hardly be admitted as an imperfection or abuse of it. I confess, in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement, such ornaments as are borrowed from them can scarce pass for faults. But yet if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement [...] and therefore, [...] they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform and instruct, wholly to be avoided ; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, either of the language or person that makes use of them. [...] I cannot but observe how little the preservation and improvement of truth and knowledge is the care and concern of mankind; since the arts of fallacy are endowed and preferred. [...] Eloquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving, wherein men find pleasure to be deceived. (Vol. II, 146-7)

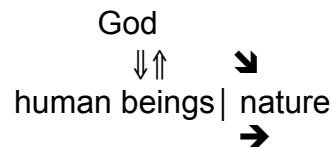
[Locke cont'd:

“Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses of Words”]

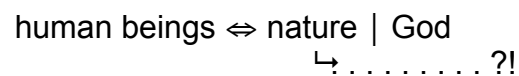
First, A man shall take care to use no word without a signification, no name without an idea for which he makes it stand. [...] Secondly, It is not enough a man uses his words as signs of some ideas : those [ideas] he annexes them to, if they be simple, must be clear and distinct ; if complex, must be determinate, i.e. the precise collection of simple ideas settled in the mind, with that sound annexed to it, as the sign of that precise determined collection, and no other. [...] Thirdly, it is not enough that men have ideas, determined ideas, for which they make these signs stand ; but they must also take care to apply their words as near as may be to such ideas as common use has annexed to them. [...] Fourthly, But, because common use has not so visibly annexed any signification of words, as to make men know always certainly what they precisely stand for : and because men, in the improvement of their knowledge, come to have ideas different from the vulgar and ordinary received ones [...]: therefore, [...] it is sometimes necessary, for the ascertaining the signification of words, to *declare their meaning* [...] Fifthly, [...] in all discourses wherein one man pretends to instruct or convince another, he should use the same word constantly in the same sense. (Vol. II, 148-164)

2) Towards Romanticism

The Traditional View:



The Modern View:



Ancients and Moderns (Encyclopedia Britannica)

[S]ubject of a celebrated literary dispute that raged in France and England in the 17th century. The 'ancients' maintained that classical literature of Greece and Rome offered the only models for literary excellence; the 'moderns' challenged the supremacy of classical writers. The rise of modern science tempted some French intellectuals to assume that, if Descartes had surpassed ancient science, it might be possible to surpass other ancient arts. The first attacks on the ancients came from Cartesian circles in defense of some heroic poems [...] that were based on Christian rather than classical mythology. The dispute broke into a storm with the publication of Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674), defining the case for the ancients and upholding the classical traditions of poetry. From then on, the quarrel became personal and vehement. Among the chief supporters of the moderns were Charles Perrault and Bernard de Fontenelle. Supporters of the ancients were La Fontaine and La Bruyère.

In England the quarrel continued until well into the first decade of the 18th century. In 1690 Sir William Temple, in his *Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning* attacking the members of the Royal Society, rejected the doctrine of progress and supported the virtuosity and excellence of ancient learning. William Wotton responded to Temple's charges in his *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* (1694). He praised the moderns in most but not all branches of learning, conceding the superiority of the ancients in poetry, art, and oratory. The primary points of contention were then quickly clouded and confused, but eventually two main issues emerged: whether literature progressed from antiquity to the present as science did, and whether, if there was progress, it was linear or cyclical. These matters were seriously and vehemently discussed.

Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744): 'Design'

[Men] of warm and sensible temper have sought means to recall the delightful perceptions which they afford, independent of the object which originally produced them.

Yet, after all, the subject before us [i.e. the imagination], tending constantly to admiration and enthusiasm, seemed rather to demand a more open, pathetic, and figured style. This too appeared more natural, as the author's aim was not so much to give formal precepts, or enter into the way of direct argumentation, as, by exhibiting the most engaging prospects of Nature, to enlarge and harmonize the imagination, and by that means insensibly dispose the minds of men to a similar taste and habit of thinking in religion, morals, and civil life.

Call now to mind what high capacious powers
Lie folded up in Man
(Book I, ll 222f.)

Mind, mind alone (bear witness, Earth and Heaven!)
The living fountains in itself contains
Of beauteous and sublime.
(Book I, ll 481-483)

[T]he attentive mind,
By this harmonious action of her powers,
Becomes herself harmonious: wont so oft
In outward things to meditate the charm
Of sacred order, soon she seeks at home
To find a kindred order, to exert
Within herself this elegance of love,
This fair inspir'd delight [...]
(Book III, ll 600-606)

Without fair Culture's kind parental aid
[...]
 in vain we hope
The tender plant should rear its blooming head,
Or yield the harvest promised in the spring.
(Book III, ll 538-542)

Edward Young, “Conjectures on Original Composition” (1759)

imitation of nature	vs.	imitation of authors
↓		↓
original composition, innovation, genius		negative effects

3) Romantic Authority

The Notion of “Paradigm Shift”

(cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 1962/1970)

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)

Poetic Consequences (“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

Abortive thoughts that right and wrong confound,
Truth sacrificed to letters, sense to sound,
False glare, incongruous images, combine;
And noise, and nonsense, clatter through the line.

William Gifford, *The Baviad* (1791)

William Wordsworth, “Preface” to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)

For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts [...]

I have said that Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origins from emotion recollected in tranquillity: the emotion is contemplated till by a species of reaction the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, similar to that which was before the subject of contemplation is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

[The *Lyrical Ballads* were] published, as an experiment which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a poet may rationally endeavour to impart.

[W]ords metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who is sensible to the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of poetry is to produce excitement in coexistence with an overbalance of pleasure. Now, [...] excitement is an unusual and irregular state of mind, ideas and feelings do not in that state succeed each other in accustomed order. But if the words by which this excitement is produced are in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed when in an unexcited or less excited state, cannot but give great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling.

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.

Low and rustic life was generally chosen because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better spoil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer, more emphatic language [...] because in that situation the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. [...] The language [...] of these men is adopted (purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike and disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived.

[T]here neither is nor can be any essential difference [between the language of prose and metrical composition]. [...] They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; [...] the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.

[A poetic] selection of the language spoken by men [...] will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life, and if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of the rational mind. [passage added in 1802]

What is a poet? [...] He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endued with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind, a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him, delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. To these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present, an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet [...] do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves, whence, and from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement. [passage added in 1802]

The blank verse is a condition for strongly varied clause and sentence length. [...] In contrast to the tight linearity of the syntagmatic chain [in neoclassicist poems written in heroic couplets] it has a relatively looser development. [...] There is some uncertainty about how it gets from one to the other.

(Easthope 1983: 126f.)

William Wordsworth, “Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the WYE during a Tour, July 13, 1798”, ll 89-112.

For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity.
[...]

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore I am still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye and ear, both what they half-create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
[...]

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