

Romanticism and Romantic Poetry

Alan Haffa

Romanticism

- Passion over Reason
- Nature is seen as a source of beauty and meaning
- Movement and Action are valued; change is good
- Revolutionary tendencies; question traditional social hierarchies

Sturm und Drang, Storm and Stress(1767 to 1785)

- Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803): Poetry requires Genius and can not be taught; Shakespeare and folk literature promoted as expressions of natural genius
- Name comes from F. M. von Klinger, *Wirrwarr; oder, Sturm und Drang* (1776)
- Political reaction against entrenched power of German nobility; literary reaction against neoclassical constraints on creativity
- Passion and emotion replaced the self-constraint of neo-classicism
- Youthful energy striving for Freedom and self-fulfillment

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781)

- 1748, play, *Der junge Gelehrte*, *The Young Scholar*, in the French, neo-classical style; self-described goal of becoming German Moliere. Other plays satirized human foibles such as hypocrisy, bigotry (against Jews), and corruption.
- 1756-7, *Correspondence about Tragedy*; purpose is to arouse admiration and pity as a result of emotional involvement; Aristotle with a proto-Romantic twist!
- He advocated a German theatre that would highlight not merely ape French court theatre, would be realistic, and would be modeled on Shakespeare
- He wrote a fragmentary Faust, in which Faust is not evil, and his pursuit of knowledge is justified before God

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832):

- 1771, *Gotz von Berlichen*: a play about a 16th century German Robber Baron
- Von Berlichen rebels against the Medieval Feudal structure
- Independent, freedom-minded
- Represented Goethe's revolution against the old order and his desire for intellectual and artistic freedom

Faust

- Based on historical Georg Faust, 1480-1540
- Goethe worked on it from 1773-1832
- Goethe's Faust makes a pact in which he asks to experience the sum of all human experience, and when he ceases to desire more, to die and surrender his soul in exchange
- Emphasis upon experience rather than knowledge is a romantic touch

Faust's statement of realization: a renunciation of Romanticism?

- "I merely raced across the earth,
Seized by the hair each passing joy,
Discarded all that did not satisfy;
What slipped my grasp, I let it go again.
I have merely desired, achieved, and then
Desired some other thing. Thus I have stormed
Through Life; at first with pride and violence,
But not less rashly, with more sober sense.
I've seen enough of this..."

Faust and Romanticism

- Faust's attempt to live beyond normal human limits is superhuman and romantic
- The pact itself is romantic in that he desires to experience and to feel the sum of all human pleasure; not book knowledge, but lived knowledge
- His failure, however, is both a reminder of our limits, but yet he is heroic for his striving, for his energy, for his desire to serve humanity. This is why the angels save him from hell.

William Wordsworth

- Childhood in Lake District
- 1790s, visited France and sympathized with Revolutionaries
- After War between England and France, he was conflicted
- 1804, Rise of Napoleon and Wordsworth becomes a Royalist
- Preface to Lyrical Ballads, 1798, with Samuel Coleridge

Controlling Ideas in Wordsworth's Romanticism

- Sympathy of Nature and Man
- Use of Natural Language of Men
- Focus on Simple Men, Farmers (Pastoral?)
- Passion over Reason: Interest in feelings
- Poet as a man who feels more intensely than most men.
- Imagination

Emotion in Poetry

- Poetry should evoke an emotional reaction, but it should not aim at “outrageous stimulation...” He comments on the “extraordinary incidents” of the time and the “increasing accumulation of men in cities” as a cause. The objective is to provide a counter stimulus, which is emotive, but not destructive or overwhelming. Other romantics will disagree with Wordsworth.

Intimations of Immortality:

<http://www.bartleby.com/101/536.html>

- Natural connection of Children with Nature: "Child is the Father of the Man"
- Loss of "Immediacy" with Nature as we Age
- From Grief to Joy in Apprehension of Nature
- Joyful Exuberance is purpose of existence
- Loss; Tree; Is it Tree of Knowledge? Fall of Man?
- We still get glimpses of immortal, transcendent world in Nature
- "Trailing clouds of glory do we come/From God"

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

- Poetic Narrative; Rhyme gives a mystical, supernatural impression
- Harmony of Man and Nature and God: the Albatross as a symbol
- Man's relationship to Nature as Man, not as Child; both blessing and threatening
- Remorse: need for confession
- Mariner: the simple man with simple words
- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834>

Conclusion

- Lessing, Goethe and Herder initiated Romanticism in Germany
- It was a reactionary movement to Neoclassicism and to the political conservatism of the time.
- Wordsworth and Coleridge's 'Lyrical Ballads' introduced Romanticism to England: the problem of Man's Separation from God and Nature as the Bridge to Transcend
- Romantics share some attitudes: Nature, passion, freedom