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THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT: PHRASE OR FACT? *

THE DISPUTE OVER THE MEANING, or lack of meaning, of the word "Romanticism" has been growing in intensity during the past few years. On the one hand we have Northrop Frye and René Wellek, in *Romanticism Reconsidered* (New York and London, 1963), declaring that a stabilization of opinion has at last been achieved, and that the existence of a Romantic Movement with clearly defined features is now generally admitted; and a well-known journal styles itself *Studies in Romanticism*. At the same time, the recent *Oxford History of English Literature*, wary of periodization, tries to avoid the term. W. L. Renwick says, in Volume IX, *English Literature 1789-1815* (Oxford, 1963), that the expression "'pre-Romanticism' is a positive hindrance" to the study of English literary history; and Ian Jack, in Volume X, *English Literature 1815-1832* (Oxford, 1963), devotes fifteen pages to an attack on the word "Romanticism" itself. The day threatens to dawn when computers will be enlisted in the quarrel, and Josephine Miles, with her pioneering statistical tables, will be held responsible for the dehumanization of literary history.

Since the scholarship on both sides of the argument is unimpeachable, it is apparent that the disputants' attitudes towards the problem are determined by their historiographic preferences rather than by any special information held by one school or the other. Some historians conceive of the past as a series of periods, each exhibiting certain distinctive features and some inner consistency; others simply feel uncomfortable when expected to classify their literary experiences in categories such as "Baroque", "Neo-Classical", or "Romantic". Since I happen to be one of the group that finds terms such as these misleading, I have undertaken to review the grounds for objection to the idea of a "Romantic Movement." I make no claim to originality or to progress over the reasoning of Ian Jack, or even of Lovejoy ("On the Discrimination of Romanticisms"); the purpose of this article is merely to assemble more

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aspects of the arguments against the phrase "Romantic Movement" than its opponents have been accustomed to adduce. As a rule they are content to raise one or two theoretical objections, or to show the ineptness of the conventional terminology in a limited area. The apologists of the "period" concept have been much more systematic and comprehensive in their defence; in fact, the disproportion between the two is so great that one wonders why such a strenuous and elaborate rebuttal should have been called forth by such a mild protest.

Because the subject is a rather intricate one for treatment in a brief article, I shall begin with an outline of the argument.

I. First I shall offer evidence for the advance of Romanticism in England, France, Germany, Russia, and Italy between 1770 and 1840, under eleven topic headings. Then these eleven topics or "earmarks" of Romanticism will be reconsidered:

(1) to evaluate the evidence for a contrary view: namely, that not these attitudes but their opposites are characteristic of the period, or, alternatively, that they declined in importance during this period;

(2) to weigh the possibility that the eleven characteristics of Romanticism first proposed are equally typical of previous periods of literary history.

II. A general discussion of the problem of periodization in literary history and some suggestions for a solution of the problem with respect to Romanticism:

(1) Wittgensteinian definition;

(2) an existentialist re-interpretation of the period;

(3) A study of what the works themselves convey, without reference to categories.

Before casting doubt on the method of periodization, I shall begin by accepting the conventional description of the "Romantic" age, and present evidence which seems to support the argument for the advance of a Romantic Movement between 1770 and 1840. If we consider the literature of Europe and subsequently of America in the early years of the nineteenth century, we may perceive the development of a new group of attitudes, arising independently in each country, yet showing remarkable uniformity in this cultural area as a whole. A list of these new attitudes would include: (1) cultural nationalism; (2) an interest in mediaeval literature and folklore; (3) a respect for the simple and natural life of primitive peoples, accompanied by an unprecedented respect and admiration for children; (4) a preference for the simple, human style of writing over the rhetorical devices and artificial diction of eighteenth-century literature; (5) a love for the supernatural, the extravagant, the fantastic, and the irrational; (6) psychological analysis and subjective experience—notably love—as the main subjects of fiction; (7) a tendency to use melodramatic

forms in which emotional expression counts more heavily than organization, pattern, or any set of rules; (8) a return to transcendental religious beliefs, in which the practical deism of a rationalistic age gives way to the sense of immediate inspiration, whether through Pantheistic agencies, Catholic sacraments, or neo-Platonic demiurges; (9) in social thought, a dominance of political revolutionism, with its attendant doctrines of the levelling of classes, female emancipation, and sexual freedom; (10) in literature, too, a revolt, against French influence and the Latin tradition, with Shakespeare and the Greeks being taken as the models for the new literature; (11) in philosophy, a reversion to idealism, and a repudiation of pedestrian empiricism in all realms, history, politics, science, as well as the arts.

If we consider the evolution of Romanticism in terms of a series of generations, we may begin in England with Sterne, Goldsmith, and sentimentalism. From there the movement zigzags across Europe. It goes to France, with L'Abbé Prévost, Diderot, and Rousseau; to Germany in the *Sturm und Drang* movement, with Herder, Schiller, and Goethe; back to France with de Stael and Chateaubriand. By this point it has become ubiquitous. A new generation of writers arises in Germany: Hölderlin, Novalis, Tieck, the Schlegels. Wordsworth and Coleridge produce the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Following them is the next wave of English Romantics: Scott, Keats, Shelley; Germany continues the trend with Hoffmann and Heine; France picks it up once more with Hugo, Vigny, Lamartine, and Musset. In the meantime Romanticism had established itself in Italy with Foscolo, Manzoni, and Leopardi; in Russia with Zhukovski (translator of Gray and of the German ballads), Pushkin, and Lermontov; in Spain with Larra; in America with Poe. One of the late expressions of Romanticism is the delightful comedy of Musset, Beddoes, and Buchner.

The evidence for the spread of the movement outlined above is so massive that one scarcely knows which of innumerable illustrations to apply. I shall group the examples under the eleven headings previously listed. (1) Cultural nationalism, through ubiquitous (e.g. represented in Italy by Foscolo), is most fully exemplified in Germany, with the Young Germany movement and the nationalistic verse of Körner, Ruckert, and La Motte-Fouqué. (2) The interest in mediaeval literature and folklore is expressed in ballad collections such as Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. The controversy over the authenticity of Chatterton's "Rowley" poems, supposedly written by a mediaeval monk, raged for decades; and Napoleon carried Ossian with him on his campaigns. The historical novel and drama gained sudden popularity with Scott, de Vigny, Hauff, Pushkin, and Manzoni. It became the fashion to be old-fashioned; even the French eventually succumbed to the

trend, and Hugo, Charles Nodier, and Gérard de Nerval responded by writing ballads and fairy-tales, or by collecting folklore. (3) The admiration for the primitive was encouraged by Rousseau's suspicious partiality to the quadrupedal posture, not to speak of his indignation at the maltreatment of that noble affiliate of the human family, the orang-utan. (Oddly enough, recent blood studies indicate that Rousseau's classification was probably right, at least with respect to the gorilla and the chimpanzee.) The idealization of the ape by Rousseau and Lord Monboddo is only the extreme of Wordsworth's idealization of the shepherd, an attitude that informs the anthropologists' pursuit of island paradises in our own time. The Child, too, comes into his own at last; childhood is the time when all significant impressions that will control our later life are formed; the child has special characteristics that must be taken into consideration in his education and conditioning. He is not merely a small, an imperfect, or an immature adult. From Wordsworth to Freud childhood is viewed as the key to life, its summary and its ideal phase.

(4) Since Wordsworth and Rousseau have served as our main illustrations so far, we may use them to exemplify the theme of simplicity in literary style as well. Rousseau, in the introduction to *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, prides himself on his unemphatic style; he is satisfied to present natural human life, without the cheap spice of crime or violence, as an adequate object of human interest. Only a corrupted taste will seek for something more. A generation later, Wordsworth, in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, announces that he will have no more of pompous periphrase, frigid personification, or any other form of rococo affectation, and declares that he is using the language of ordinary men to describe the experiences of ordinary men: this is his conception of poetry. (5) At the same time, the taste for the natural and simple seems to be associated with a freeing of the mind from rational restraints, a mental self-indulgence that releases the imagination from bondage to reason. The supernatural and fantastic strain in Romantic literature is exemplified in a poem that was included in the same volume with Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, namely, Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner". The Gothic novels of Anne Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis, and, later, Charles Maturin are furnished with all the conventional Romantic paraphernalia, and are rich in extravagant moods as well as improbable episodes. The later generation, Hoffman, Poe, and Gérard de Nerval, refined the genre and concentrated it in the form of the short story, producing on the foundations of the Gothic tradition some of the unquestioned masterpieces of Romantic literature.

(6) The release from reason and from a concern with the external order of the world leads necessarily to a new preoccupation with the subject. The analysis of subjective states, personal feelings, the emotions, and notably love, comes to dom-

inate literature for the entire century. Goethe's *Werther*, Senancour's *Obermann*, Chateaubriand's *René*, lead to Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*, Constant's *Adolphe*, Lermontov's *Hero of our Time*, and finally the psychological novels of Dostoyevsky. Even the psychoanalytic novel may be seen in germ, in de Vigny's *Stello*.

(7) As might have been expected, the free modes suitable for the communication of subjective experience come to prevail over stricter literary forms. Schlegel, in *Lucinde*, announces and exemplifies the repudiation of all order. The Byronic verse tale and the novel supersede the epic, the lyric replaces the moral satire, the drama of Hugo and Buchner supplants classical tragedy, and the distinctions between genres are thrown to the winds. The prose of Chateaubriand shades imperceptibly into the poetry of Aloysius Bertrand, and so the characteristic lyric form of the nineteenth century, the prose poem, is born. Evolutionary, Faustian man demands the progressive artistic vehicle that Lessing had described in *Laokoön*; in music as in literature the static, fixed or given form is eschewed. Goethe, the author of the early expressionistic novel *Werther*, is also significantly the creator of *Faust*. Expression, the success of which is measured finally by the artist, comes to matter more than communication, which confines both author and public within a pre-established code or language.

(8) The religious revival associated with Romanticism progresses from the interest in mediaeval cathedrals expressed by Tieck, Herder, and the young Goethe, through Chateaubriand's apologetic *Génie du Christianisme*, to the conversion of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799; published 1824), on to Lamennais' Christian socialism. It is felt with equal intensity, though in less conventional form, in the Pantheism of Wordsworth, for whom the surface of the natural world "worked like a sea" with messages from the God within it, or in the West Wind of Shelley, driving through all phenomena, objective and subjective alike. Once again, spirits walk the earth: for Blake, for Coleridge, for Newman an angelic vision is more than a pathological fantasy; and even purely literary religious feelings find consummate expression, in the prayers of Lermontov, or under the normally satiric pen of Byron, in *Don Juan*.

(9) For the young men of the late eighteenth century, political revolt was automatic. The American and French revolutions set the tone for the period, and few major authors of the time remained untouched by the radical fervour that swept Europe. Freedom of expression and political freedom were mutually necessary doctrines; the principle of a permanently stratified society was intolerable alike to Rousseau, Godwin, the young Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, the young Goethe and Schiller, Blake, later to Shelley and Hunt, Pushkin, Lermontov, Heine,

and the generation of 1830. Napoleon's upheaval of Europe, as well as the example of his personal rise to glory, damaged the public image of the *ancien régime* beyond repair. Gradually the heated republicanism of the early 1800's gave way to a realistic satire of the dying hierarchy, most aptly illustrated by Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Similarly, the proclamation of female equality, and the plea for free, natural sexual relations, unhampered by social convention, which can be found in Mary Wollstonecraft, William Blake, and Friedrich Schlegel, evolves into the practical female suffrage movement later in the century. And the systematic immoralism of de Sade, inherited by Nietzsche, was eventually domesticated by Freud.

(10) France supplied the model for the political rebellions of western Europe; but its literature, resting on a classical seventeenth-century foundation, was inevitably associated with the old aristocratic order and consequently fell out of favour with the moderns. Madame de Stael discovered Germany in 1810, and proclaimed the difference between the social, *esprit*-oriented intellect of France and the individual, philosophical, intense, and enthusiastic nature of the Germans. French literature was produced by cold recipes and resulted in nothing more than intellectual play. Nature and truth were needed to restore vitality to the arts. Let us copy the classics by all means, but copy them by being as original as they were in their day, says Stendhal. The models of nature and truth in literature are Shakespeare and the Greeks. The influence of Shakespeare is apparent in numerous translations, such as those by de Vigny and the Schlegels, and in the style of many plays, for instance, Musset's *Lorenzaccio* or Pushkin's *Boris Godunov*. In England, he was rehabilitated by Coleridge, who showed that Shakespeare was not merely a literary monster, great in spite of his weaknesses, but as much a craftsman as a genius. Coleridge invoked the principle of organic form, namely, that a work of art achieves its purpose by following the laws of its own necessity rather than by adhering to a set of predetermined rules, to defend Shakespeare against the usual charges of irregularity or incoherence.

An exalted view of Greek culture is also common in the Romantic period, stemming from Winckelmann and reappearing in Shelley, Keats, Byron, Chénier in France, and notably, Hölderlin in Germany.

(11) As for the last in our series of topics, the philosophical tenor of Romanticism; again, it is not the French but the English and German traditions that furnish our best examples. Romanticism is the idealism of Berkeley and, later, of Hegel, enriched with the historiography of the Italian, Vico. Locke is the enemy of the Romantics except insofar as he admits the importance of sensory experience, thus encouraging the tactile immediacy which is fundamental to the Romantic aesthetic. But it was the private, individually measured reality of Berkeley that

gave Blake the conceptual means to exclaim, "When the sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea? O no, no, I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying holy, holy is the Lord God almighty." With Kant, the so-called external world moves one step farther back under the onslaught of the *a priori* categories; with Fichte and Hegel, the self and history become ideal constructs.

The bird's-eye view of Romanticism that I have just given implies, of course, that there is a coherent movement which we may call Romanticism, and that it has a discernible direction or development during the period in which we have described it. This is an act of faith which we are not necessarily compelled to share.

If some captious critic chose to take exception to parts of our description of the period between 1770 and 1840, we might be hard put to it to defend ourselves. Objections could be raised on numerous grounds: (1) that the attitudes and opinions we have listed are not representative of the period; indeed, the grounds for determining what is representative of a period have never been established; (2) that our list of cultural peculiarities or "earmarks" has nothing peculiar, earmarked, or identifiable about it: the selfsame attitudes are as emphatically expressed in numerous other places and periods as they are in the one we are discussing. Generalizations are ubiquitous; and to classify all previous expressions of similar views as "pre-romantic" merely begs the question; (3) that even within the list we have furnished, there are contradictions. How can we say that it is characteristic of Romanticism to seek the natural, the simple, the ordinary (e.g. Wordsworth) and at the same time that Romanticism is a pursuit of the fantastic, the melodramatic, and the extraordinary (e.g. Coleridge)? If Wordsworth and Coleridge felt themselves to be basically at variance over such an important issue, why must we feel constrained to reconcile them posthumously, and force two hostile attitudes into an unwilling marriage?

To begin with the exceptions, if, indeed, they be exceptions rather than the rule, Benthamite Utilitarianism, the philosophical rationalism of the French *idéologues*, neurological psychology, and technical science were all products of the so-called Romantic era. The supposed "spread" of Romanticism may equally well be described as a decline in Romanticism. The official pre-Romantic, William Blake, despises chiaroscuro in painting and insists on absolute clarity of line. His mythological literary medium was learned from his eighteenth-century contemporaries. Goethe, by 1800, was trying hard (and successfully) to eradicate the *Sturm und Drang* from his system. The French Revolution itself had been informed with the stern spirit of *classical* Stoicism. Wordsworth thought of himself even in 1800 as reacting *against* the sickly extravagance and sentimentality of the German drama;

his hope was to quell the rage for emotional stimulation at all costs from which eighteenth-century audiences seemed to suffer, and to replace it with a sober appreciation of less "Romantic" situations. By 1810 the last pretext for affiliating him with any unorthodox causes had expired. Jane Austen, undoubtedly the greatest English novelist of the period, is hardly a Romantic, nor can Maria Edgeworth or Thomas Love Peacock be so accounted.

The arguments against our simple periodization are as numerous as the arguments in favour of it. Let us take the issue of Greek influence as an example. In the German tradition, what we call the Romantic period is designated as the Romantic-Classical period. Because of this difference in terminology, the Hellenic influence in Goethe and, above all, in Hölderlin is, for the Germans, a dimension of German Classicism. For us, who employ a different word for the same events, Keats' love for Homer and Greek myth is an example of Romantic Hellenism. There is, however, no good reason why we should not divide up the whole cultural era under consideration according to the German scheme rather than according to ours, in which case Keats would be classified as a Classical writer.

If we take our eleven headings and look systematically for attitudes in this period antithetical to those first described, we shall find any number of examples. (1) Nationalism is subordinated to *Humanitat* in Schiller. (2) Primitivism in all its forms, literary or anthropological, is heavily satirized by Thomas Love Peacock, who furnishes one of his novels with a hero by the name of Sir Oran Haut-Ton; Sir Oran is duly elected to Parliament. (3) Nature is abhorred by de Vigny and Leopardi, as well as by the later Byron. (4) The critical opinions of the influential English reviewers of the time, Jeffrey, Croker, Lockhart, are not usually considered favourable to Romanticism. (5) Rousseau, our oft-invoked source of Romantic doctrine, turns out on close inspection to be a dubious partisan: he thinks children need special treatment because they are *inferior* to adults, and must never be allowed to forget this painful truth; and his supposed political libertarianism shades into totalitarianism, complete with religious persecution, in the *Contrat Social*. The supposedly fantastic Novalis was a scientist, and on more than one occasion declared that more can be accomplished with cold reason than with the most exalted fancy. In the midst of the Gothic novel itself, a curiously anti-Romantic kind of argument crops up. First, the Gothic novel is of anti-clerical, and therefore, in a roundabout way, of rationalistic tendency. This implicit rationalism becomes apparent at the centre of the greatest Gothic novel, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*. The author is bitterly aware of the unreliability of human values. Ecstasy, we learn, can be bought in the drug store; and the most spiritual love cannot survive the simplest physical

hunger. Perhaps this knowledge, rather than some fantastic guilt, is the intolerable secret that drives Melmoth on his wanderings.

(6) The supposed subjectivism of the Romantic period is difficult to demonstrate. What does it mean, for instance, to say that Shelley is subjective? On close inquiry he turns out to be essentially a philosophical rather than a lyric poet; indeed, the vast mass of his poetry is curiously detached from personal concerns and almost monomaniac in its devotion to a general philosophic idea, the idea of progress. Byron is an eighteenth-century satirist, avowed and proud disciple of Pope. Wordsworth's *Prelude* turns out to be a typical rather than a personal autobiography. Keats writes about poetry, not about himself: his problem is our whole human problem of overcoming time, about which there is absolutely nothing private or peculiar to Keats. Subjectivism finds short shrift among the practitioners of so-called Romantic irony. This interesting doctrine, as developed in Germany especially, by Tieck, Solger, and Friedrich Schlegel, presupposes a self-consciousness on the part of the artist which is constantly undercutting the seriousness of his own art. It begins with the assumption that the divorce of intellect and emotion is unavoidable, and that all pursuit of naturalness, sincerity, or directness of expression is futile. Consequently one must exploit one's self-consciousness, the radically divided self, as the basis for a higher kind of art, in which abstract awareness hovers over and provides a unity for the chaotic disorder of experience. Far from being the expression of a rebellious, planless freedom, then, a play like Tieck's *Puss in Boots* is the exemplification of a highly deliberate, conscious, and, above all, rational theory of art, in which the work is an objectification of the artist's self-consciousness rather than the outpouring of his spontaneous emotions.

(7) Not even the most formal and confining genres of literature are abandoned in this period. Byron prided himself on adhering to the dramatic unities. Some of the very best poems of Keats and Wordsworth are sonnets, including that defence of the sonnet, "Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room", in which Wordsworth praises the form for its very strictness. The lyric does not, after all, replace the moral satire in Byron—nor, for that matter, in Shelley, as anyone who has read *Oedipus Tyrannus* will testify. There is nothing startlingly revolutionary in the verse forms of the French Romantic, Lamartine, or of de Vigny, who in any case claimed to be the heir of that eighteenth-century Classicist (or shall we call him pre-Romantic Hellenist?) André Chénier. Foscolo, and certainly Monti, in Italy, do not cultivate formal innovations; and Russian Classical poetry (which means, by the way, Pushkin) is, for the most part, almost too regular for Western ears.

(8) By this point it is scarcely necessary to point out that whatever religious

revival was experienced around 1800 was more than balanced by the rationalistic, scientific, and pragmatic philosophy of the time. Many of the best "Romantic" poets—e.g. Keats—had no discernible religion, and others, such as Leopardi, are explicitly anti-religious. The cult of reason is at least as popular as the cult of God, and that insidiously anti-Romantic science, physiological psychology, under the misleading pseudonym of phrenology, is laying the foundations for cerebral localization and the mechanist view of mental function. Once the analogy between the brain and the machine had been firmly established, though mankind was to fight an increasingly desperate rear-guard battle against this encroachment upon the whole conception of the soul and of absolute values, not all the contortions of Bergsonian vitalism, Freudianism, Gestalt psychology, or phenomenology could avert the consequences. We have the doctors of the so-called Romantic period, such as the renowned Dr. Gall, to thank for the cybernetics, the probing electrodes, and the computer brains which are gradually assuming control of our world.

(9) Not even political radicalism can be confidently identified with Romanticism. Chateaubriand is usually said to have grown more typically Romantic as a writer *after* his conversion from Revolutionary ideals, when he became the spokesman for political and religious orthodoxy. De Vigny was consistently on the side of authority in every time of crisis. Burke, Hegel, Joseph de Maistre, sometimes called political Romantics because of their non-utilitarian view of the state, are anything but revolutionaries. Indeed, the nostalgia for mediaeval civilization, with its rigid social structure, its traditionalism, and its aristocratic virtues, so often associated with Romanticism, would seem incompatible with a levelling proletarian spirit. If Novalis' *Die Christenheit oder Europa* be considered a typical expression of Romantic political attitudes, then those attitudes would have to be described as profoundly reactionary by even the mildest liberal standards.

(10) The cult of Shakespeare and of the Greeks, if such common tastes can be called a cult, is indeed highly developed during this period, if not quite as fully as is generally presumed. For instance, Wordsworth's formation is primarily in the *Latin* authors; Lucretius is one of the principal influences on Shelley, in combination with the massed effect of that supposedly rejected tradition, French eighteenth-century rationalism, Voltaire, Holbach, and Helvétius. The French *idéologues* and their ancestors from La Mettrie on also left their mark on the work of de Vigny, Foscolo, Manzoni, and Buchner. This supposedly dead French eighteenth-century tradition gave birth to the father of modern Russian literature: Pushkin derives, avowedly, from Chénier, Parny, and the pseudo-Classicists; which may be one reason why some Western readers, as we have said, find much of his work too thin and

even-textured for their taste. But French, after all, remained the language of "civilized" Russians for a hundred years. And Shakespeare's total perfection had been proclaimed by Gerstenberg and Goethe long before Coleridge put his seal of approval on the bard—an approval which was not universally shared. J. Mansbach has shown, in an unpublished paper, that practical theatre criticism of Shakespeare in the early nineteenth century did not, on the whole, subscribe to the opinions of Coleridge, Schlegel, Lamb, or Hazlitt.

(11) As for philosophy, we have already pointed out that Kant, Schelling, and Hegel had keen competition from positivist doctrine, which runs in a steadily broadening stream throughout this period, from Condillac, through de Tracy and Cabanis, to culminate in Comte, Feuerbach, and Marx. Bentham and the Mills promote Utilitarianism. Darwin sets out on the voyage of the *Beagle*. The atomic theory is proposed. Automation advances so rapidly that frame-breaking riots ensue. After all, we cannot ignore the fact that the technological revolution which has transformed the world and may be about to destroy it began to gather momentum during the early nineteenth century. Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, providing the ethos, the information, and even the practical illustrations necessary for the spread of industrialism, was no stillborn masterpiece; and Diderot's own materialism and determinism are, if anything, *the* typical philosophy of the whole era from his day to ours. The movement he launched has developed with bewildering speed and without discernible interruption; the world as we know it is our heritage from his disciples.

We have run through our eleven topics in order to point out opinions antithetical to those first described, and to show that a different constellation of ideas may with as much justice be attributed to the Romantic period as the set with which we began. One might add that most of these eleven positions had also found strong support in previous times, so that their claim to identification as peculiarities of the years from 1770 to 1840 is further weakened. (Incidentally, this matter of dates provides more occasion for confusion, since the "Romantic Movement" is identified with very different periods in different countries). (1) Literary nationalism is universal at least since the Middle Ages; indeed, it coincides with the rise of the vernacular languages and is everywhere established, at the latest, by the end of the sixteenth century. (2) Dryden was already complaining, in his preface to Chaucer, that the literary antiquarians of his day would flay him for having dared to modernize archaic English; and the admiration for mediaeval romances and the world they portray begins, one might say, even before the Middle Ages were at an end—if ever there was such a thing as the "Middle Ages." (3) A love for the primitive

and natural life is as old as the pastoral tradition, which is in turn as old as literature. The contrast between the sweet contentment of country folk and the corrupt, frenetic existence of city dwellers was never so convincingly depicted by Rousseau as it was by Dio Chrysostom, in the first century A. D. (*The Hunters of Euboea*). (4) In the same way, the simple, unaffected style, avoiding all artificiality and exaggeration, has been regularly praised in every age that has produced significant criticism, from the time of Aristotle's *Poetics* on. Indeed, it may at least as fairly be identified with a Classical as with a Romantic tradition; one finds it as often under the pen of a Ben Jonson or a Boileau as under that of the "Romantic" writers. I have been dropping the suggestion, which could be pursued, that every period has its Romantic and its Classical side; it follows that the designation "Romantic" or "Classical" is one of the least useful for distinguishing a period. (5) The supernatural and fantastic strain in literature had first been nourished by the mythological subject-matter inherited from pre-Christian culture and later replaced by the Christian marvellous, as in Tasso, Milton, or Klopstock. Sheer rampant fancy, unassociated with this tradition, is to be found in the Alexandrian novel or verse tale and is later picked up by the Romances and the picaresque genre (not to mention Spenser or Shakespeare). Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus* (1669) is a good example. The improbabilities of Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* are notorious; and Macpherson burst upon the literary world, we should remember, as early as 1760. (6) Literary subjectivism had a fair beginning in Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, and self-analysis has been a common failing of authors from Catullus and Horace on. It is almost in the nature of the literary process that the writer should be partly his own subject. As for the psychology of character and the emotions, it is no discovery of the Romantics, or of Dostoyevsky, or of Freud; if it were, Sappho, Sophocles, Euripides, Shakespeare, Racine, Cervantes could never have written. As a matter of fact, the eighteenth century possesses its own genius in this genre: Richardson's *Lovelace* is a fuller and deeper characterization than any of his so-called Romantic or Byronic successors, including both Manfred and the Pechorin of Lermontov's *Hero of our Time*. And rank, rampant emotionalism is nowhere as abundant in the Romantic period as it is in the eighteenth-century sentimental school (e.g. Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*). (7) The irregular forms, again, are no prerogative of the Romantics. The eighteenth century doted on irregularity; from Swift's *Tale of a Tub* through Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* to "Jean Paul" 's novels the principle of incoherence was aggressively maintained. The ode was cultivated precisely for its expressive irregularity of form in the eighteenth century; the delicate lyrics of Gunther, Smart, and the early Blake convey at least as much sensitivity as the more emphatic verse of Keats, Shelley, or

Heine. It was a measure of praise for Shakespeare in the eighteenth century to say that he was great in spite of the rules; it was the bad conscience of the Romantics that drove them to formulate a new set of rules into which they could, after all, fit Shakespeare. The eighteenth century apparently felt that precisely what escaped any sort of rule was what should be valued in poetry. (8) The religious revival of Romanticism is, of course, no revival at all. Religion had not yet died in Europe, in spite of Deism. Wordsworth's Pantheism is merely watered-down Shaftesbury, an egocentric reduction of Cambridge Platonist doctrine. The voice of an authentic religious renewal is heard in John Wesley, in Joseph Priestley, in the Jansenist movement, in German pietism, long before it tapers off in the Romantic period. Too many of the Romantic religious revivalists, like Chateaubriand, may be fairly described as "*Des épicuriens à l'imagination catholique.*"

(9) Political revolt can hardly be identified with a particular period. It may be true that the French and American revolutions affected the thinking of every author in this era; but, the various European countries differed in their stages of political development during this period, and it seems odd to classify under one rubric the Decembrist revolt in Russia and English reform agitation in the 1820's.

(10) The demand for originality in literature is already made by Castelvetro in the sixteenth century, and the highest praise of the eighteenth century is reserved for *original* genius, for instance by Young. The conflict between the Shakespearian and the Cornelian theatrical tradition, however, runs through the whole of the seventeenth century; it is the subject of Dryden's famous *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, and is merely revived by Lessing and Goethe at the end of the eighteenth century; there is not the faintest novelty about it when it reappears in Hugo. As for Romantic Hellenism, I can think of no praise of Homer in the Romantic period as impassioned as that of Pope's preface to the *Iliad*, composed around 1715. If a matter of a hundred years is no obstacle, that preface, in fact, could serve as the ideal Romantic manifesto.

(11) Finally, philosophy, of course, has no limitations of time, and to confine idealism to the Romantic period is to cage the universal. We have already said that Berkeley (*Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*—1710) provides the crucial system for understanding Blake's philosophy. But Hobbes, Locke, and Leibnitz must also be read for insight into the intellectual background of the nineteenth century, not to mention Shaftesbury, and the ubiquitous Plato, Plotinus, Aristotle, and Descartes. To ignore the sequence of philosophical tradition and to attempt to detach a "period" from it, is to ignore the plain fact that human thought is continuous.

Let us now drop the schematic procedure I have been following and turn to questions of theory. I do not wish to proclaim that we must reverse our definitions and call the early nineteenth century the anti-Romantic period; but I am trying to demonstrate the complexity of the problem. No simple formula will summarize a period for the people living in it, and the mere passage of time does not give us the right to simplify their lives in retrospect. It may be possible to distinguish differences in style from one age to another; if so, these differences will require a subtler type of analysis than has been applied hitherto. The historical vocabulary studies of Josephine Miles referred to previously may serve as a guide to such a refinement of method, though it is not yet a safe one. But certainly the mere cataloguing of characteristic preoccupations or general features is an unsatisfactory approach to the definition of literary periods. I have mentioned that Ian Jack's history of the literature of England between 1815 and 1832 tries to solve the problem simply by avoiding the word "Romanticism". A Wittgensteinian approach, attempted by J. Lethcoe, suggests that we should found our definition on the current use of the word rather than on the phenomenon. Thus, after having surveyed the ways in which reputable scholars employ the term, we draw up a list of characteristics of Romanticism (something like our enumeration of eleven features). At this point a special concept of definition is introduced: two works may both be said to belong to the same class if they exhibit several characteristics of that class, even though they may not actually share any of these characteristics. Thus one work may be defined as Romantic because it is melodramatic, revolutionary, and irrational, whereas another work may be identified as Romantic because it is simple, religious, and folkloristic; although no single characteristic is shared by the two works, they fall into the same category. This approach to definition stirs me to objection, but some may find it satisfactory.

The problems of terminology in literary history are especially difficult because our view of the subjects we are describing with this terminology is constantly changing. We continue to use terms like "Renaissance" or "Romantic period" long after the accumulation of new knowledge and changes in our own sensibility have transformed our entire conception of these times: yet in some way the old terms live on to interfere with our present awareness and with our present experience of the subject matter. I am, then, proposing two things: one, that we abandon our preconceived notions about what authors are supposed to be feeling or doing in the period designated in the English historical tradition as Romantic, and simply look at what they actually are and what they actually say. Second, I suggest that we admit frankly that we must re-fashion the period in our own image, in the sense that we structure it according to our present preoccupations and appraise it according to our

present literary tastes. There is no point in continuing to identify Shelley as Ariel or "blithe spirit" when what matters to us in Shelley is the grim philosophy of the end of *Prometheus Unbound*, or the metaphysical intricacies of "Mont Blanc." "The deep truth is imageless" could serve as the epigraph to Kafka's *Castle*, and "to hope till Hope creates/From its own wreck the thing it contemplates" is not far from the same mark. Keats is no lush and mindless sensualist; his major idea is also startlingly similar to Kafka's. Grecian urn, nightingale, Belle Dame, all the forms of the ideal that "tease us out of thought" hover incessantly beyond our reach. Every attempt to stop time, to make beauty permanent, yields not a reality one can grasp but, at best, an image. That image is all we can have of the ideal world, and, as image, it is both obstacle—a dead thing, like the figures on the urn—and an avenue of approach to the eternally receding goal—i.e., a work of art. (See Maurice Blanchot on Kafka). De Vigny provides another obvious analogy to recent philosophy—which may be why he has remained more popular than many of his contemporaries in France. "*Seul le silence est grand*" could be the title of a book by Heidegger. His novels praise the Stoic fortitude that refuses to pretend life can be good; his theme is always, "*L'espérance est la plus grande de nos folies*", again sounding very much like a caption from Kafka. One lives as best one can "*dans un monde avorté*", despising nature and founding one's courage, absurdly, on the nothingness that falls away beneath our feet. If we look to Italy, we find in Leopardi a spokesman for the identical philosophy; and it can be recovered from Byron's plays as well. The basic unworkability of life, the necessity of building values on an absent foundation, the familiar existentialist "absurd", is as much the concern of the authors of this period as it is of our own.

But I am not really trying to re-fashion our image of this time on an existentialist pattern, though one could easily do so: the light of Kierkegaard can be turned back over the previous century as easily as it can be cast forward upon our own. I am simply trying to point out what matters to us in these authors, what seems permanently valuable. And these permanently valuable things cannot be defined as "Romantic" any more than they can be defined as "Neo-Classic"; they do not belong to any period. If they are real for us, they escape periodization; they exist in themselves and for themselves. No book will be read because it is "Romantic"; what it is read for, whatever that may be, simply has no relation to such categories. The more we interest ourselves in the works themselves, the less time we will have to think about what "movement" they "belong to."

If we adopt this attitude, we will observe that we read the Romantic authors for quite unromantic reasons. The pageant of Byron's bleeding heart has no more

spectators; the mature, balanced satire of *Don Juan* and the intense, probing thought of *Heaven and Earth* and *Cain*—yes, and even of *Manfred*—are what we appreciate now. We read the Romantic Part I of Goethe's *Faust* mainly in the hope of understanding the unromantic Part II. The conversation poems of Coleridge reveal themselves as a more convincing achievement than his more portentous efforts; the same may also be true of Shelley, whose poetry improved in texture as it declined in emphasis. Both turn out to be excellent humorists, in the vein of light verse; but the myth of the solemn Romantics dies hard. The Marquis de Sade is not read for the sake of the secret thrill of perversity but as the spokesman for authenticity at all costs; the cult of truth turns out to be the real obsession of an author who for generations had had only an under-the-counter vogue. Godwin suddenly becomes popular as a psychological novelist with *Caleb Williams*, a work that shows an odd similarity to Saul Bellows' *The Victim*. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's fifth *Reverie* loses the appearance of being merely rapturous nature-description when we realize that the dial-tone of pure existence for which he listens as he drifts across the lake is the very tone that the surveyor in Kafka's *Castle* is desperately trying to reach as he calls under various false disguises from the inn. Chamisso's *Peter Schlemihl*, Gogol's *Nose* could both be Kafka parables; to find oneself without one's shadow or without one's nose is likely to result in a change of experience almost as radical as to find oneself transformed into an insect; and the need for a radical solution to one's problems becomes equally inescapable. Even the most conventionally "Romantic" lyric, if it is a good poem—such as Pushkin's "Three Springs"—is not good in a particularly Romantic sense, but simply because it tells a universal truth convincingly. To detect the Romantic elements in a poem is something like detecting its Freudian content—in neither case have we discovered anything that concerns the poem as poem. Let us take what we find and cease to block our responses with presuppositions. Good Romantic literature has the same characteristics as good literature in any period. What does it mean to say that lines such as these, from Keats, are Romantic?

My spirit is too weak; mortality
 Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep, . . .
 ("On Seeing the Elgin Marbles")

Aye on the shores of darkness there is light
 And precipices show untrodden green; . . .
 ("To Homer")

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Aye, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine; . . .
 ("Ode on Melancholy")

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too— . . .
 ("To Autumn")

Adieu! for once again the fierce dispute
 Betwixt damnation and impassion'd clay
 Must I burn through;

 When through the old oak forest I am gone,
 Let me not wander in a barren dream,
 But when I am consumed in the fire,
 Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire.
 ("On Sitting down to Read *King Lear* Once Again")

Save me from curious conscience, that still hoards
 Its strength for darkness, burrowing like a mole;
 Turn the key deftly in the oilèd wards,
 And seal the hushèd casket of my soul.
 ("To Sleep")