Romanticism

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1. What

“Help me find words to explain,” writes Augustine in his highly personalized *Confessions*(1961:22). The line, part of an opening appeal for forgiveness from God, acknowledges that “even those who are most gifted with speech cannot find words to describe you” (23). The stance of explicit supplication might find a few rare modern equivalents; the appeal for help to describe one’s own person does not. Augustine was *not* a Romantic.

Witness now the opening of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, over a millennium later:

I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself. Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. (1931:1)Rousseau was a Romantic. It is obvious. But why? How can we say this–or, better, how is it that we “already recognise” *that*? In the lines above, a new theologically and anthropologically significant structure underpins what is a relatively new and significant “confessional” poetics. If bare recognition is equated with knowing, we can say already that we “know” Romanticism, and thus in a limited sense, know in advance “what” it is. And as the gap between the two confessions is mainly a temporal one, our understanding of Romanticism concerns also its temporal identity, *when* it came into being.

But can we say what sort of thing Romanticism itself is? Because it is at once something definite and yet it does not have sharp boundaries, we say unabashedly that Romanticism is a *field*. Hasker argues an analogy between the "fields" studied by physical science with extra-scientific, philosophical "fields." On the one hand, a field is generated by material configurations such as the alignment of iron molecules in a magnet; on the other, crucially, "once generated, the field exerts a causality of its own, on the magnet itself as well as on other objects in the vicinity" (*Emergent Self* 190). In an earlier account, Hasker makes the important point that while the field is generated by an object, "it is also clear that the field is *distinct from* the object, as is shown by the fact that the object is sharply localized whereas the field spreads out for an indefinite distance in all directions" (*Metaphysics* 73). Romanticism is a field insofar as: (1) it is intransigent to strict localization; its boundaries are indefinite; (2) is itself the effect of certain historical shifts and axiological effects; and (3) is "causally" efficacious–once generated, it exerts its own characteristic influence on whatever lies within its ambit.

Our aim, therefore, is to spell out in concrete terms how certain textually realized axiological effects can–at different points–also be properly "causal." The field concerns an image or figure, the Romantic. We have said that the figure is both effect and cause. The figure is discernible from at least six well-known features of Romanticism. We can simply list these. They are what allow us to recognize it in the passages cited above. Romanticism is: (1) embodied in a *corporeal agonistics of authentic experience* and the suffering which frequently accompanies and legitimates it; (2) it bears a displaced theology of *creative genius*; (3) its politics, in the sense proposed by Gardner (6), is *oppositional defiance*; (4) its alterity structure is of self-proclaimed *marginality*; (5) its normative epistemological component valorizes *novelty* (with surprise, revolution, and youth being tributary structures often found); (6) its dramaturgy a *distanced* time or place. These six features are the manifest poetics of Romanticism; we will call its *points of articulation*. That is, they are the signs by which Romanticism is stabilized, articulated, defined, and experienced.

The Romantic figure would appear to be new, and has therefore a time, dating perhaps from around 1770. Romanticism consists in the refiguring of the anthropologically significant individual by such things as the rise of modern bourgeois society, the shift from functional to nominal monarchies, and a generalized secularization and democratization of the body politic (cf. Gans 164-87). This produces characteristic effects. On the one hand, the autonomous secular individual is prized like a work of art for its uniqueness (a sacred value). On the other, individuality is ascribed to all, which democratization produces a terrifying mimetic crisis of that very "flattened" self. Beyond the ordering that emerges from particular instances, then, while the linkage would appear to have no general

priority; yet all such manifestations, however ordered, are related to the above-described historical changes in the role of kingship and the sacred on the one hand, and abstractions of exchange and value on the other.

Romanticism has a series of relationships beyond its traditionally assigned limits. For instance, there are the disciplines that many see as somehow self-foundational. On the contrary, Romanticism partly guided their forms of expression, and to the extent that this is not understood, they remain Romanticized fields today: studies of the self (psychology), the social (sociology), or even an imagined supposedly rational locus of exchange itself (economics) (on psychology, cf. Girard, *Things Hidden* 377; Webb 100-102, 154). These fields are all dependent on those pre-existing forms of the self that Romanticism articulated long ago, and they all are partly derivative of it. Doubtless, in the name of social science (or whatever), we could pass many idle hours analyzing the little problems and characteristic knottings in the genesis of these and other such fields. But what matters is very simple: *they are all of them partly Romantic in what they presuppose*; all we have space for in this essay is an occasional indication of key aspects of their foundation as we proceed.

2. Romantic Branchings

Romanticism manifests itself in many places, some of them only partly understood. But if we are interested in Romanticism, we must follow the trail of many others who have pursued it to its own distinctive lair, the place it carved out for itself for self-expression and articulation. This is the domain of what might still best be called literature. The very fact it exists overtly means that there has always been a literature-about-literature from the moment of Romanticism's inception. Needless to say, not all of it is of equal value.

By literature–a term we use without rigid predetermination–we mean something quite close to what is commonly understood. That is, literature is a self-consciously imaginative mode of representation that *depicts* a certain ethics, morality, and esthetics. It is there that we find the emergent genres that allow the display of contradictory positions without necessary resolution. In it we find imagined ethico-moral scenes which "play out" issues of value. This value is derived both from what it depicts, how it depicts it, and what is assumed about depiction as such. In this respect, we must include not just works of art themselves, but also, the theories (of abstraction, of realism, of art etc.) that inform them. "Literature," in all these domains, is scenic, and the scenes are always scenes of value (of ethics, morality, esthetics) (cf. Fleming and O'Carroll 2002/2003).

Later in our essay we will see that the reflexive access literature enables to Romanticism is no coincidence. For now, though, we will content ourselves with the starting point that literature supplies for our inquiries into Romanticism. It is there, from the earliest times, that we find not just the genesis of Romanticism, but the things that have defined our relationship to it over the succeeding centuries. We have cited Rousseau, of course. His *Confessions* are a kind of philosophy. But if so, equally, they are a literary genre; as "confessions," they display a Romantic poetics (real feeling and emotion, personal truth, defiant marginality, etc.).

At the same time as Rousseau was writing, the early Goethe was similarly already devising Romantic selves and scenes. It is worth looking briefly at Goethe, while admitting that he inhabits a composite scene–with figures "behind" him (other artists), "around" him (theories explaining what art should do in the apparently new situation), and perhaps even "inside" him (characters, scenarios, modes of expression that predate this historical juncture). Goethe offers a way of seeing the emergence, and complexity, of Romantic self-articulation.

Goethe's early world-weary figure calls for a calming of the *schmerzen* suffered in his travels ("Wandrers Nachtlied" 1, p. 49); at this stage of the great writer's career, we find repeated solace in the depths of nature, be it the healing calmness that "still mit Nebelglanz/Lösest endlich auch einmal/Meine Seele ganz" of the moon's light (52) or the "Glück!" and "Lust!" of spring ("Mailied" 7). Guiding all of this, even if it appears now naïve, stands the relationship of the artist to the night generally: in "Künstlers Abendlied," the forces and rhythms of nature–of spring and night–are allied in a song paying homage to the artistic process itself. In literature, in the ordinary sense of the word, we find all the features of Romanticism displayed. In it too, we see the uneasy cohabitation of the inspired artist (a new sacral center) and the fact that this very artist claims distinction from all the other unique souls around by the artifice of being adrift, a wanderer, the perennial outsider.

But–and here we stay with the example of Goethe for a moment–we find in literature-as-representation more than a catalogue of descriptors of Romantic movements. Goethe quickly became the leading exponent of *Sturm und Drang*, and then, of course, *turned away from it*. In other words, we find in Goethe, not just an articulation of early Romanticism, but also, one of the key things that defines it as a problem still today: the attempt to refuse it. There is, already, in this early work the evanescence that characterizes later Romanticism–the need to reject, return to earlier texts, modify, render different. Realizing the instability of the self posited by *Sturm und Drang*, Goethe advocates a turn to classicism. Because of his importance, it was influential intellectually, but made no difference to a society that had yet to make full sense of itself Romantically (and this is why Goethe, the ur-Romantic, is not always himself seen as a Romantic). Romanticism is generally seen

as something that comes afterwards, in England, France, and of course, in the German states themselves. There, Romanticism manifested itself in the *Nachtseite*, as critics call it, in E.T.A. Hoffmann, of course, but most memorably in the strangely beautiful work of Novalis. Be it the search for the elusive “blue flower” depicted in his final work or the tragic biographical dimensions of his lost beloved, and his entire morbid quest for the “other side” of life, we find in Novalis the onset of fully-fledged, self-aware Romanticism. Introducing the following account of Romanticism by Novalis, Michael Hamburger (1970:76) remarks that Novalis sought a “poeticisation” of “philosophy” and vice versa. In this “poeticisation,” though, we find links to a deeper cultural formation: the reworking of the sacred and the human, the relationship between grace and nature. For Novalis,

The world must be romanticized. Only in that way can one understand its original significance. Romanticization is nothing other than qualitative potentialization . . . By giving a lofty sense to what is vulgar, a mysterious aspect to what is commonplace, the dignity of the unknown to what is familiar, an infinite extension to what is finite, I romanticize them. (Novalis, cited by Hamburger:76)When Goethe turned away from what he had a large hand in creating, he did so largely alone. So we find in the poetics of Romanticism a characteristic three-way split: those who endorse it overtly and *declare* as Romantics (like Novalis), those who seek to *exceed* it and in so doing are also Romantics (like Schiller), and those who dourly *turn away* to write bizarre poems about the metamorphosis of plants (like Goethe). The latter oppositional tactics are co-incident with the rise of Romanticism. As the editor of the poems cited above remarks, Goethe sought to turn *against it before it was even named*:

The odd historical position of Goethe is that he had, in important senses, repudiated romanticism in advance, before it had properly got under way–certainly before it was ever called “romanticism.” Later, when the label became current, he defined *das Romantische*, in a much-quoted saying, as a disease (*das Kranke*). (Luke 1964:xxi)3

Yet calling Romanticism “the sickness” does not dispel it, even from one’s own work, let alone from those that followed the tendency up to and including Nietzsche (cf. Fleming, 2004:15). The purgation is, rather, a characteristic Romantic move; indeed, the resources for the imagined turn away did not yet properly exist, and Goethe’s classicism itself became a dominant form of Romanticism as it unfolded in the nineteenth century (as the need for distanced settings in time and place became ways of supplying the epistemological need for novelty on the one hand and a mode of opposition to the everyday and commonplace present on the other).

If a few like Goethe were shocked by the transformation of the Romantic self, very

few appeared to understand the scale of the change. For despite its location in the arts, Romanticism was not just an art movement–it denotes a schism *in* value. Like the drift of landmasses, a grinding of continental plates of significance has been taking place for almost five hundred years. If the first two hundred years of this are largely inaudible, this is because the change was gradual, and for the most part inexpressible in general analytic terms of the day. To this day, it remains difficult to articulate, albeit less so to recognize.

3. How

Romanticism emerged as an *apparent* breach in value because of profound and gradual anthro-poetical changes in Western culture. These exhibit and articulate the breach; such exhibition results from the emergence of new genres of representation (new forms of poetry, the novel, especially the *Bildungsroman*, etc.). The lair is well known, as we have said. The histories are told repeatedly, but need repeating, albeit in a new way: we frame them in terms of a *poetics* characterizing the new social situation that prevailed after 1750. It is not enough to describe textual poetics in isolation; these must be rejoined to the anthropological dimensions that allow them to make sense to us retrospectively.

In the *Sacred Wood*, T.S. Eliot writes that “The only cure for Romanticism is to analyse it” (1950:31). We hear Goethe, a full century before him, speak in analogous terms–of pathology, etiology, and remedy. We write as beneficiaries of scholarship in at least three enabling fields. The *first* is the massive literature of and about Romanticism itself: the critique, the artists, the commentary. From such work, we can now describe the poetics of Romanticism and see how they permeate fields well beyond the arts, and well beyond the nineteenth century. It is well known that the Romantics did not all identify themselves to be such. This could lead one to suppose we will shortly be proposing yet another arbitrary definition of the same. Yet contrary to the widespread view that Romanticism is a loose genre, or that it can be construed as any one of a number of things, we say that at least one version of Romanticism can be precisely defined and described.

An heuristic pledge: our account verifies its poetics by restoring them to a fuller axiology than has hitherto been thought possible. This leads us to the *second* area in which profound research has taken place. From the works of a number of writers, notably John Milbank and Stephen L. Gardner, we arrive at a new understanding of axiology itself. As we will see later, axiology exists as a shriveled remnant of a once vibrant field of interconnection. At most now, when acknowledged at all, it is seen as a pairing of ethics and aesthetics into a theory of narrowly construed *value*. Milbank, by contrast, restores the axiological join by building on his work which reveals the “secular” as a theological construct in *Theology and Social Theory*. This

allows Milbank to conduct re-readings of texts we thought we knew intimately (witness Milbank's astonishing account of "Longinus," a major source of inspiration for Enlightenment and Romantic writers alike) (see especially, Milbank: 1998:269ff.). He finds that the sundering of content and form, of beauty and sublimity, ascribed to Longinus by modern commentators needs to be revised in light of a more careful reading of the text itself. Milbank proceeds by restoring ethical as well as "historical" contexts. In our case, these remind us that Romanticism is a definable moral, ethical, and esthetic formation. Its characteristic distancing, relegating, oppositional poses–be it the revolutionary or the tramp, the Guru or the genius–are still with us, and the supposedly meta-level "critical" pose of relegation is revealed as something of a sham. *Third*, the ground of the analysis is further reinforced by originary anthropology. The works of René Girard and Eric Gans are central to this process (we focus mainly on the latter, and then, for reasons of space, mainly on the work most closely relevant to establishing this terrain,*The Origin of Language*). This then is how we intend to proceed.

4. Not

Few have a problem grasping the idea that the (Romantic) self is significant, even sacrosanct. But there is some resistance to the idea that, in a secular context, this value is in tension with mass democratic society. Imagine, then, a truly equal society–a vision enshrined in the very conception of Romantic modernity. It seems profoundly and self-evidently good, yet even as a vision, it provokes some unforeseen consequences. Stephen Gardner's book, *Myths of Freedom*, explores, in a Girardian vein, how the very possibility of equality provokes a mimetic crisis for which a restricted vision of freedom first appeared as a potentially stabilizing solution. Yet, far from proving a force for stability, freedom developed a metaphysical quality which drives ever more radical forms of discontent and critique. An index of the incoherence of such critiques is the way the word freedom can be used: freedom from oppression of course, but also, freedom from want, freedom from anger and anxiety, freedom from despair; also freedom "to" (wealth, self-expression etc.). Gardner is not, of course, calling for a system of deliberate inequality or oppression. Rather

"rational freedom" I suggest is finally mythical–blind to the full extent of the problem of modernity. Modern freedom, with its obsession of autonomy, self-sufficiency, independence, plays into the hands of that very madness, even when it is "rationalized" . . . Freedom famishes rather than dispels the impulse to seek one's gods in other men. (13)4

For Gardner, such philosophies of freedom reach an apotheosis in the Romantic idiom:

Most critics of modernity, as well as critics of these critics, see modernity as a "dialectic of enlightenment"–which is to say, in terms of the imperialism of calculative reason, technological will, mastery of nature, the iron cage of bureaucratic rationality, mass society, repression, commodity fetishism, and the like, all versus "freedom" in one guise or another–spontaneity, autonomy, authenticity, originality, creativity, will-to-power, self-activity. . . All of these operate at bottom within the terms of romanticism, broadly understood. (xii)The Romantic act of *declaring against* can only proclaim itself positively if it uses high-sounding metaphysical terms like "freedom" and "justice."

Declaring oneself against is a pervasive modern quasi-politics whose poetics has appurtenances with Romanticism, and whose radical posturing does nothing to evade an entanglement with the Other it proclaims to denounce or evade. Both Gans and Girard have shown this in quite detailed analyses of Romantic literary classics. One of the authors of the present work has summarized the structure as follows:

For (Girard's) Dostoevsky, the heroism so typical of romanticism is merely the symptom of a more slavish servitude expressed as self-possessed "pride." Pride, in this sense, is evinced by those pervasive forms of "negative imitation": the pursuit of individual distinction by doing what others *don't* do. The most obvious paradox of negative imitation is that it is still thoroughly entangled with the Other–the acquisition of putative "difference" demands a meticulous observation of others (and perhaps even their approval) so that the romantic subject can distinguish himself or herself *from* them. Thus, fierce individualism leaves the mimetic relation unscathed. (Fleming, 2004:15)The stance reflects the ambivalent structure of individuality-in-general: at once sacred-unique and flattened-banal, the Romantic subject is an always a convenient locus or pretext for the enactment of a mimetic crisis. Even declaring against requires tacit approval, an antagonism staged in terms identical to one's purported rivals.

Because its "politics" constitutes a defined element of Romantic structural poetics, it allows for the ready identification of Romanticism when enacted (rather than being itself any kind of profound critique or ontology). Romantic against-ness was not abolished by the onset of modernity or even postmodernity. It is still very common. For instance, two quite popular writers, Hardt and Negri, write beneath the heading "Being-Against: Nomadism, Desertion, Exodus" in their book*, Empire*:

To us it seems completely obvious that those who are exploited will resist and–given the necessary conditions–rebel. . . . If there is no longer a place that can be recognized as outside, we must be against in every place. This being-against becomes the essential key to every active political position in the world, every

desire that is effective–perhaps of democracy itself. . . . Whereas in the disciplinary era sabotage was the fundamental notion of resistance, in the era of imperial control it may be desertion. Whereas being-against in modernity often meant a direct and/or dialectical opposition of forces, in postmodernity being-against might well be most effective in an oblique or diagonal stance. (2000:210-12)Or not. We have dealt with the substantive thesis of this book in a previous issue of this journal and have no wish to address the problems in its conception of the field (Fleming and O'Carroll 2003/2004). But if we set aside the absurdities of their argument, we have yet to explain the attractiveness of this writing, of its apparent *political* force. At stake in the politics is the *stance* the writers take. We would also say this: its *rhetorical force* is actual; it is its putative *politics* that is merely apparent.

Modern Romantic "declaring against" faces the problem that writers in the nineteenth century faced: the turn against can only proclaim itself positively if it empties terms like "freedom" and "justice" of local meanings. It does this by imbuing them with metaphysical qualities. Gardner himself does not explore what he means by Romanticism in any detail. There is no need to. Like us, he founds his analysis of freedom not in the claims of systems or writers about it, but in the work of Girard. He reasons it this way:

Anthropology is neither an ethics nor a politics, but, he seems to suggest, more fundamental than either, because it addresses man on the level of the primitive origin and ultimate unraveling as "order" in the most basic sense. . . . More simple, it is a deconstruction of the social mechanism of envy, violence, and pride . . . Although his anthropology implies a certain reconciliation to liberal modernity, it also indicates just how far history is beyond the panaceas of politics–or philosophy–that is, beyond human control. (13-14)We are very used to tracing these questions in the distinct theatres in which they seem to occur–freedom and justice are proper to philosophy and politics, defiance and alienation to psychology and sociology, forms of expression to the arts and so on.

5

But the above distinctions are *themselves* Romantic divisions. The tendency to such "discipline"-based division is probably co-incident with the rise of Romanticism, even if it is not our purpose to establish so large a claim. Rather, all we seek to point out is that a broader sundering of axiology made coherent analysis of Romanticism–or whatever one chose to call it–difficult for almost a century. How could it be analyzed when confronted with the naturalized and apparently self-evidentiary notion of the individual that emerged in all these domains? How could it be analyzed when the contexts that informed it belonged in one discipline, the attitudes that drove it in another, the methods for its analysis in yet another, the

texts that revealed its defining structures in yet another? If this seems like a plea for interdisciplinarity, it is no such thing (or at least not in the usual sense). What it does rather is show where the appeal for a generic interdisciplinarity comes from in the first place: a sense of thwarted possibility, or potential merely glimmered. Interdisciplinarity proved as naïve as the grids it succeeded, as many of the supposedly interdisciplinary fields yielded to an uncontroversial common denominator of cultural relativism. For even if one could get the materials together, how could one analyze it when one wing of sundered axiology repeatedly announced–from Rousseau to the early Romantics to Nietzsche–rather like a one-winged and one-legged budgerigar that it now ruled the roost and everyone else should listen to its unique singing? Michel Serres catches the exquisite irony of this pathetic scene:

The eighteenth century. . . sought to remove all rationality from anything that was not science: it's science's bid to take over the totality of reason. Those areas suddenly bereft of reason include religion, of course, literature and the humanities, as well as history and the past: they are consigned to the irrational. And the nineteenth century *Sturm und Drang* will confirm this momentous decision by confining all literary moments to myths and dreams. In this regard, the history of science, epistemology, scientists and even the man in the street went along with this idea, which is the source of the usual historical diagram: reason later, unreason before. What can we call this, except prejudice? (51)The irony in the fact that Goethe, one of the most widely knowledgeable artists, had much to do with this transformation from within the artistic realm must be studied elsewhere. To be sure, there were good reasons for this turn on the part of these early Romantic artists (in this respect, Tobin Siebers shows very well in the *Romantic Fantastic* a propos the Romantic recourse to the supernatural both the reasons for the turn, and the problems of exclusion that arise from it). Yet what matters is that these artists actually embraced the new collapsed axiological status within which they found themselves, preferring the role of mad seers to that of see-ers who comment on the madness. The problem thereafter was that the poetics of Romanticism can readily be traced in esthetic texts and theory, but even the best writers could not escape the remnant space in which they found themselves.

5. Esthetics Sundered: Failed Attempts at "What" and "When"

What then are the poetics of Romanticism according to those who are best situated to study them? There are many excellent studies. They all yield insights into the poetics of the figure of Romanticism. This figure is present from Rousseau onwards. From Coleridge's reveries of Xanadu to the dying heroines of Romantic operatic melodrama (Puccini's Mimi or Verdi's Violetta): all these are recognizable, notwithstanding the distinctiveness of the voices, even of the critiques. They share

in the sense of outsideness, the uniqueness of spirit, the exultation in their personal pain the sheer extent of which supposedly lends *their* life its genius–and is imagined as supplying *our* life with its meaning, albeit on a lesser scale (we, the merely mortal circle of readers, the crowd that supplies validation). In their contempt for us, they tell us of the heights of human experience, of alienation, of suffering, of almost vengeful vindication. Literary criticism in particular has revealed the varieties of writing that supply these heroes and heroines, the genres which best support them and the highest moments of those genres (the works of the English Romantic poets, for instance, not their playwrights) as well as the fields of resonance (*e.g.*, German Romantic music, *Sturm und Drang*, Goethe's Faust plays, French realism, and later, German expressionism in all the visual arts, including film). Sundered esthetics, even in these highly literary accounts, always seeks to restore links. This was true even in the time of "new criticism" which, for all its rhetoric of the text-as-object, always sought to *situate* texts before trying to describe what they did.

But "new criticism" was a mere recasting of what Serres says about early Romanticism. That is, it sought something positive in the fact it was to be quarantined in its field of effectivity, and like the earlier one-legged budgerigar, it too squawked loud and long about its novelty. It was neither novel, nor did it respect the absurd limits it appeared to set itself (in fact, setting them allowed them to be broken repeatedly, a kind of politically correct lip service that once uttered, allowed commentary to make all sorts of observations).(1) Always seeking the join, it imagined itself as having found it when, in its most truly Christian moment, it sought self-abolition by dissolving itself into the new field of cultural studies. There, it imagined, politics and esthetics might be reconnected. The imagining was temporary. The failure of this project, evident even before it properly got going, was caused by a number of things, notably an epistemological uncertainty about the grounds of cultural analysis (what was culture, how was it to be discussed, what were its methods?) and a series of new no-go areas, things *not* to be discussed (how did esthetics get prohibited, for instance?).

Yet in the moment before cultural studies erupted, a number of interesting projects occurred within the umbra of esthetics. In addition, some commentators simply disregarded prevailing Romantic-modern norms and generated careful analyses of the poetics of Romanticism, among other things. The three writers we wish to consider are not, in any sense, iconoclasts. On the contrary, they work with traditions of one sort or another. It is just that they do not fit the "cultural studies" version of culture on the one hand, or the entirely residual version of esthetics on the other. For this reason, they each supply interesting starting points for an anthropoetics of Romanticism in the form of a preliminary reopening of the field of axiology in the full sense. Yet they are each trapped in an ethical roundabout from

which there is, apparently, no escape.

6

The first seeking an exit is the reception esthetician, Hans Robert Jauss. Jauss often touches on the relationship between the rise of a particular esthetics, notably what he calls the esthetics of genius (Romanticism), the arts in which it is practiced and the audience for which it is created. This in turn leads him to wonder about the relations between such esthetics and other social fields:

declarations concerning poietic capacity in the technical sphere remained rare . . . But they had always been expressed in poetry and art, which is also shown by the new concept through which the creative self-understandings that frees itself from creation according to models was able to express itself: *genius* as the quintessence of competencies that set poietic capacity above creation according to patterns and learnable rules was named and characterized in the aesthetic sphere before it was attributed to the scientific discoverer and technical inventor and subsequently also to the major political and military figure. (50).Jauss' attempt to ground his analysis in a regimen that combined sociology, esthetics, and pietistic hermeneutics was suggestive but ultimately inadequate. Its value lay in calling attention to circularity of definition, resulting on the one hand from impoverished post-Kantian esthetics (which we will look at briefly in the next section) and on the other, from a sociological rather than anthropological view of the scene on which the Romantic hermeneutic–and poetic of genius–was enacted.

The circularity he seeks to short-circuit with the Schleiermachian hermeneutic circle of understanding is a generic problem. It has come into view even for those who confine themselves to the polite version of literature, as in this attempt to say what Romanticism is or was:

One way is to return to the authors we have always known to be Romantic, and then generalize a concept out from what we find: following this route, Thomas MacFarland identifies more than fifteen "hallmarks" of Romanticism. The method is circular obviously, because you must presuppose what is "Romantic" to make the selection of works from which to deduce an idea of "Romantic"; but this circularity is intrinsic to the pursuit. (Perry 3)The latter claim is wrong, but we will leave it for now as a statement of the problem: that is, the writer, Seamus Perry helpfully identifies this sort of conundrum (an oscillation between an empirical and a conceptual account of the issue). He is also right to point to the fact that

The single most important fact about the word [Romanticism], as it appears to the literary history of the British Isles, is that it is a posthumous invention: the Romantics did not know that was what they were. (4)And of course, they *still* don't.

These definitional roundabouts, be it the *reductio* of the Perry-style commentator or even the inadequately grounded fusion of poetics and society under a hermeneutic that freely admitted circularity, are broached from a different direction by the eccentric yet anthropologically inclined systematizer of myth, Northrop Frye. Frye returned frequently to the topic of Romanticism after *Fearful Symmetry*, his famous study of Blake, a figure, like Rousseau, whose most famous work (notably "Songs of Innocence") appeared before the French Revolution. We have not space to consider this important writer in any detail here, but we do wish to look at a later paper published on Romanticism from a talk he gave in 1962. Once again, like Perry, he broaches the definitional issue:

Romanticism is not a general historical term like "medieval": it appears to have another center of gravity in the creative arts. We speak most naturally of Romantic literature, painting, and music. We do, it is true, speak of Romantic philosophy, but what seems to us most clearly Romantic in that are such things as the existential ethic of Fichte or the analogical constructs of Schelling; both of them, in different ways, examples of philosophy produced by an essentially literary mind. (1963:1-2)Frye's thesis on Romanticism, like the works of Jauss, entails a contrast with much earlier modes of thought. Where Jauss contrasted idioms of reception from an earlier society and culture, Frye identifies a shift "in the spatial projection of reality . . . [leading] to a different localizing of the various levels of that reality" (5). This leads Romantic poets to situate God "within" whereas earlier poets, even including Milton, situated God "up there" (8). This, of course, needs scrutiny in a historical-theological sense, in line with the work, for instance, of John Milbank, who examines the change from an Augustinian conception of earth and heaven to a medieval nominalist conception of self, soul, and place (see Milbank 1993:418-22).

Yet Frye is correct to orient his analysis towards esthetics on the one hand and a quasi-cosmography on the other. This is no closed roundabout, if one is brave enough to take the exit. On the contrary: we are beckoned; an axiology grounded in a moral universe comes into partial view. Its other aspects–the ethical/anthropological, the spiritual, the emotional and the erotic–are all already implied. Witness this:

The metaphorical structure of Romantic poetry tends to move inside and downward instead of outside and upward, hence the creative world is deep within, and so is heaven or the place or the presence of God. (16)It might sound tenuous, but it is profoundly intuitive and correct, even if we can verify none of it yet. It is very easy to jeer at terms like "downward" and "upward," directionality without place, notions without discipline. Yet Frye understood very well that formalized anti-Romantic movements failed to outflank that which they sought to deride, that they had "no resources for becoming anything more than a post-Romantic movement" (24). He

himself had little more in the way of resources; yet his intuitions, his close reading of what he looked at in terms of what it must anthropologically and structurally means: all this led him to avoid falling into what he described, a rarity indeed.

7

6. Towards a Restoration

To give an intuition of what a full axiology might look like before we can deploy it, we begin again with the work of John Milbank. Milbank is a theologian, and the reason esthetics only emerges as a partial field in his work is simple enough: it is not what preoccupies him (his is a thesis, as we mentioned earlier, about the relationship of secularity and the sacred in Western culture). We cannot trace Milbank's thesis in this essay. Suffice to say that for Milbank, there are a number of key turning points in the history of Christendom traceable in the works of a number of writers (Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Kant, Derrida, and Deleuze). In his work, the shift after Aquinas is the most important, but the work of Kant is also very important to an understanding of the Romantic-modern conception of secular and sacred. In passing, Milbank makes observations on esthetics that, while sketchy, are indicative of what an axiological analysis of Romanticism might one day look like.

Milbank does work on Kant that one wishes Lyotard had done on his way to the very idea of postmodernity. That is to say, unlike Lyotard, Milbank actually *establishes* the relationship in Kant of judgement in general and esthetic judgement. He does this in a number of places, the most important of which is "The Soul of Reciprocity" (377-84). Milbank here articulates what Lyotard merely takes for granted: that the *Third Critique* deals not merely with esthetic judgement, but with judgement as such (and that, therefore, esthetic judgement plays a major role in Kant's conception of judgement in general) (383). Like Lyotard, Milbank finds that Kant's attempt to find bounds to judgement fails, but he does not therefore seek to pour everything into that failure and call it "postmodern." Milbank seeks, on the contrary, to understand this failure at the point where Kant distinguishes the sublime from the beautiful. This, Milbank insists is where Kant goes wrong:

For Kant, the sublime concerns time before space, since anything spatially immense can be superseded, but we can never synthesise an infinite time series. But this upsets the idea that the sublime lies simply beyond the furthest margin. For since time is truly endless and ungraspable, it seems that we should always await the next instance of the unfolding of temporal moments before reaching a final verdict on anything. Therefore the sublime limit is encountered not at the edge, but within the midst, threatening all conceptuality. (383)The next step for Milbank is to show that the foundational Kantian esthetic (and we should recall that Kant did, in many

respects, found what we think of today *as* esthetics) is based on an untenable distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that this is an arbitrary distinction:

Even in the case of theoretical reason, one must deduce that there is somehow involved a prior, freely judged selection of a “beautiful” . . . range of phenomena . . . and from this inference it follows . . . that the “frame” (like a picture frame) or boundary around a beautiful object rendering it discrete and surveyable as will be recalled) is actually none other than the brink on the edge of the sublime abyss. Thus what defines the beautiful is that boundary-fading-to-the-infinite of the sublime, which in time might endlessly further re-define . . . such that the experience of the aesthetic sublime is always at a place of purely conventional stoppage. (383-84)The argument, heir to Derridean and other recent traditions, re-opens the need to examine judgement in general in relation to esthetic judgement (first quarantine station) and then, to look at the way the merely beautiful–the entire field of arts in other words–is reduced to a defined theatre (second quarantine station). Finally, in this essay, and in another extraordinary analysis of “Longinus,” Milbank alludes to the fact that esthetics is not merely a result of the way something is wrought, but crucially related to *what* is depicted. The recourse to Longinus is apt, and it is to Milbank’s credit that he rescues this text from the readings of Enlightenment and Romantic esthetics that understand it as dividing the two fields (the beautiful and the sublime) absolutely from one another, and thence, of dividing what is depicted from how it is done (third quarantine station).

Milbank shows us the genesis of a certain view of esthetics, and we have already seen the widespread view that the figuration of Romanticism is something of only esthetic interest. But what do those who claim to know this *mean*? In most of the treatments–including the most exhaustive–of the Romantic figure, be it Byron or the stance of his narrative voice, be it Coleridge and the taciturn ancient mariner, we find the literary treated as the self-evident domain of which and in which may be included Romanticism as a tradition or a genre.

How very convenient. In this picture, literature, as Serres correctly observed, lies on the side of “myth” and “the past.” By designating Romanticism as esthetic, it too is quarantined to the myth and to the past.

We contend to the contrary that the two formations are not to be so quarantined, that to do so is manifestly wrong. In addition, we suspect that the two formations are themselves inter-related: that is, the Romantic is the precondition for the full emergence of the literary as one-legged budgerigar, while also, the budgerigar and behind it, the hidden true formation of esthetics, yielded the immense treasury of genres and modalities needed for the constitution of Romantic and then modern

subjectivity. In this picture, all the so-called sciences of the self are derivative of the subject that the Romantic-literary supplied, especially, but not only, the self (psychology), the society (sociology, politics, etc.), and the naïve rational subject (economics).

Books that explore the origins of Romanticism would do well to ask the more basic questions concerning what is reputed to be its lair: what is esthetics, what is literature, what is the literary?

7. What is Literature?

8

“Literature” animates that ambivalent Romantic artifact, the individual. We said we would return to the question of literature itself. The reasons by now should be clear: “Literature” in the grand sense of the term did not (and maybe does not) exist without Romanticism. This is not condemnation. To the contrary, Literature is probably the best name for the representational schema that emerges from the schism in value: the schism itself leads to a distinction between morality and ethics, and these two and esthetics, followed by a host of further derivative sunderings (form and content, high and low culture, and so on). The edifice that anchored an entire culture was disintegrating. “Literature” is the representational locus of the slow motion axiological tectonics we still hear shrieking today in the endless putative refutations of intertwined value formations in texts. As we said earlier, Literature includes not just creative and imaginative writing, but also, writing about that writing (commentary), and some of the writing about the meaning of that writing (literary theory, philosophy of literature, etc.). After Romanticism, Literature is one of the sense-making systems of the world.

Hence our interest in the one winged budgerigar. Its song has long been overlaid with shrill ones of modern formalistic wonder and provocation, of postmodern abandonment of the very possibility of formal wonder (not to mention the admission of formerly low culture to the ruins of the birdcage in which it continues to sit). The schisms that underpin the rise of the Romantic field lead directly to the rise of literature and all its successors. In this respect, it is not enough for us to simply repeat our contention that the axiological trinity broke up. We need now to see how this partition works in order to see the pivotal role literature-in-general played and continues to play in generating worlds and selves to inhabit them. Romanticism, the ambivalent individual self, comes into view as a possibility only after the self can display a unique spirit vis-à-vis the universe (replete moral philosopher), a unique intentionality vis-à-vis society (replete ethical judge) and a unique expressivity vis-à-vis an audience (replete site of esthetic production and reception). But this cannot

happen if God, society, and decorum are aligned with each other. The slow rupture of this alignment began as a loosening so that the one became three, and as the separation progressed, the site of expressivity gained voice as a site of self-evidence. By this, we mean that literature appears, from the very outset of Romanticism, as a site of display to be sure, but also, one that operates as a self-evidencing structure of esthetics. It did so by effecting the illusion of a break from ethics and morality (and by corollary, the most important corollary, these two themselves appeared as distinct domains of inquiry).

Literature as it is now understood implies a strut that was not there before Romanticism. From about 1750, literature became a self-evidently distinguishable and replete formation: *that was the point*. It is true that, at first, the splints and mirrors of morality and ethics continued to hold it in place in the universe and in the social world. But the one-winged beast offered its song to that world and universe in ways that presupposed nothing more than one individual genius, one pen and paper, and one circle of adoring admirers to confirm the illusion.

The best evidence of the changes are to be found in the opening pages of prose fiction works in the lead-up to fully fledged Romanticism. In Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, for instance, there are protective devices designed to reassure the reader that the narrator–and the novelist–is not a scoundrel. By the early 1800s, however, these devices have fallen away, and even worthy novelists like Jane Austen can simply mark the text *Pride and Prejudice: a Novel* (1985:49). The shift is well enough known. But we need to be careful in interpreting it. Its significance lies not in the fanciful domain (fairy tales and other such tracts exist well before this time) and not in the realm of artificing per se (this we can find in antiquity), nor even in the rise of prose fiction forms (another rather older domain). Rather, it lies in the fact that the narrative is not principally told to instruct morally or ethically, nor even to escape, but for reasons of*serious enjoyment*. The stodgy-sounding formulation sounds familiar to us (an echo of Victorian literary theory perhaps). But what the retrospective glance obscures is the fact that the serious enjoyment was now able to be undertaken for its own sake.

The question, "what is literature?" is hardly new. Our response situates it coevally with Romanticism. Posed genetically, the etymological dimensions of the network of words encircling literature–esthetics, literature, literary–offer illustrative support to our claims. *Esthetics* is only used as a word since the 1750s, modified slightly by Kant where issues of the sublime and the beautiful, as we have just seen, are considered. It referred originally to the senses, and to knowledges available to the senses, but it was always significant as a modern coinage, and it is to Kant that we owe its modern significance (Williams 1976:31). *Literature*, another apparently old word, referred for most of its English life to literacy. In the mid-eighteenth century,

the word refers to the “practice and profession of writing” (185); again it is only in the nineteenth century (surprise! surprise!) that we find the term *literature* and its modern sense of imaginative works of poetry, prose, and drama (187). A similar pattern is observable in the evolution of the word *literary*, originally a synonym for literacy (185).

These observations are only suggestive. They indicate conventional conceptions at particular points in time, no more (and no less). So we are not suggesting that there was no literature prior to 1750. On the contrary, we contend that the axiological situation prior to this time was this: beauty, truth, and morality were still able to be aligned with each other, all of them rendered coherent by an overarching and organizing framework of grace and nature. It is true that the clarity of this alignment was already fading by the time of the Renaissance and maybe, if we look closely for consequences in Milbank’s work, even earlier. Indeed, contrary to the view that Romanticism simply burst incommensurably onto the scene as some sort of entirely new paradigm in–say–1789, we contend that it emerged gradually, the explosive appearance reflecting the cumulative convergence of the new literary demanded by the new subjectivity, comprising as Gans rather amusingly puts it, “new wine in old bottles.” Such would be our hypothesis: there is an origin, and these moments are describable as is the point when it is fully fledged, what arose from it is what is described in the various analyses of Romantic poetics; it did not arise in one stroke although it *seemed* to do so.

To locate this origin, we need an approach able to describe both the progressive genesis we now hypothesise, as well as its defining features. As what we describe–a radical axiology–is itself, in our view, foundational of the supposedly already-founded studies of self, society, and *homo economicus*, we need a yet more originary form of analysis than any of these, and it is to this kind of inquiry we now turn.

9

Of sundered esthetics (the one-winged budgerigar, say, of literature and literary theory), of an ethics cut off from its grounds (be they theological or anthropological), and of Romanticism, that half-understood formation grasped mainly through its figuration in the doleful Romantic who yet reaches out for approbation, we have seen a range of explanations, suggestive but for the most part insufficient even on their own terms. Yet when presented together, especially in the section above, we see how we approach the possibility of a new mode of inhabiting what we have until now merely sought to describe. An approach that combines a ground of analysis and a sound orientation towards the poetics of the figure of the Romantic is now available, and we write of it beneath the heading of

the title of this journal.

8. Anthropoetics

In an excellent survey essay, Richard van Oort traces three ways of examining fiction. He calls them the logical, the phenomenological, and the anthropological approaches. The logico-semantic, epitomized by some ingenious excursionary work by John Searle, asks how it is that fictional works “can mean without referring” (439). The phenomenological approach, exemplified by the work of Roman Ingarden, an antecedent to reception theory, posits a theory of fictional meaning based on a distinction between primary and derived intentional objects in communication in general and literary texts in particular (448). Searle, for van Oort, is unable to hold apart the two domains of reference and slides into the paradox he seeks merely to present: “to transcend this basic ontology is to abdicate the very structure of reality itself” (447). Ingarden on the other hand defers some of this difficulty by substituting for it the equally irresolvable paradox of intersubjectivity (451-52). As van Oort says,

for both Searle and Ingarden the problem of fiction is characterizable as a logical-semantic paradox. For Searle, fiction is a form of pretense whereby an author partakes of a language game in which sincerity is not expected. . . . Ingarden’s model . . . ultimately . . . makes the same claim: fictional sentences are quasi-judgements which arrest the logical passage from (conceptual) meaning to (worldly) reality. (455)So fiction–and thence literature–defies the approaches taken by Ingarden and Searle. These explanations fail because of their grounds of analysis. To attempt to explain fiction logically-semantically as Searle does is to fall into the hall of mirrors itself. To seek to stabilize its fields of meaning from within an already presupposed literary framework as Ingarden does should lead to a reframing of the literary itself. But Ingarden (like Jauss and Iser after him) baulks at the task, although Jauss is clearly more aware of what is at stake (witness his attempts to engage then “East” German attacks on the supposed idealism in the Western tradition of reception theory).

What is needed is an anthropological account of the poetics of literature. We believe this need is best fulfilled by generative anthropology, which itself can be situated with frameworks partially mapped out by René Girard. Van Oort argues the case in relation to fiction in the following way. Eric Gans has long sought to develop an account of the origin of language; he has done so according to the principle of parsimonious hypothesis (458). This principle, reified from works since the time of William of Ockham, affords an originary hypothesis because it posits a scene for the origin of language. Working with the Girardian notion of mimesis, Gans goes on to offer a twist of his own: the two hands reaching for the appetitively attractive object

resolve violence by deferring it via language. Then, the sign

emerges when both subject and model, in aborting their appropriative gestures, become aware that they are now, not appropriating the object, but in fact designating it. The sign allows mimesis to continue, not as an appropriative gesture, but precisely as a representation of the object. From the (horizontal) appetitive relation between the subject and the object is born the vertical relation of the sign and the referent. (460)If course the sign itself has material existence, but as van Oort very rightly says, the designated object “becomes an intended object, irrevocably divorced from the original appropriative gesture” (460). This is how the model addresses the roundabouts arrived at by the other two models: it explains the paradox of the sign. Indeed, as he goes on to show, the sign, once objectified, “can itself become an object of reflection” (461).

The origin of language and the origin of literature–or fiction for that matter–are thus not so far apart as one might imagine. Readers of this journal, we hope, can accept the abbreviated version we have just given of Gans’s work on the hypothesis and the origin of language (we have written on it ourselves in a previous issue). But we must now move a little more slowly, to trace the way the esthetic sign works, to trace, that is, the coeval onset of Romanticism and the literary in terms of a genuine anthropology.

9. Gans

In Gans’s work, the axiological dyad of ethics and esthetics is grounded in an anthropological conception of the sacred. Whether it be sociological, anthropological, or even theological, the crucial move is to grasp ethics and esthetics as grounded by this third formation, grounded and triangulated, as in an inverted equilateral, the two spires of ethics and esthetics seem, in the West, to thrust apart from each other and their point of genesis. Appearances are deceptive. The hall of those who see division–whether as three unrelated fields, or who imagine that the secular has somehow shaken the structure off by deformalising Kant’s formalisation or by breaking ethics off from morality–is more a citadel of academics than a population of fools, however naïve the position ultimately proves to be.

10

For us, on the contrary, the easier task is to reveal the obscured points of this gigantic inverted equilateral, and to link it to the field of Romanticism and the literary. Gans has offered a tantalizing sketch of how this might work in *Originary Thinking*. This work, as well as a number of essays (notably the important sketch of

the history we are about to outline in “Aesthetics and Cultural Criticism”) allows us to transcend the circularities of representation not just in the originary scene of language and the human, but also, in the subsequent scene of esthetics. In particular, it allows us to move past the roundabout of empirical versus conceptual definitions of Romanticism that we have seen already. Or as Gans puts it, these two inter-relate like this:

Instead of seeking a sociological explanation for an anthropological phenomenon, we define the latter in terms of the minimal conditions for its appearance. Only after “interpretation” has been understood in the most general possible sense doe we examine its specific historical manifestations. This is not an antihistorical position; on the contrary. The best way to respect history is to situate historically known behaviours with respect to the hypothetical beginning of history. (1998:67)In other words, empirically known texts, events, and so on do not themselves supply the originary hypotheses. These have to be applied in a provisional and heuristic way. This applies as well to the beginning of a particular esthetic as it does to the beginning of language and the horizon of the human.

In all these situations, we need to “re-imagine” or hypothesise the genesis of original human constructions, be they language as such or esthetics. Gans does this by positing a “scene” of origin, minimally conceived, in which a particular structure, known to us afterwards, first emerges. In the field we are examining, it can be as well applied to esthetic as non-esthetic texts, to plays as well as to other forms of art. Commenting on the work of reception theorist Wolfgang Iser, Gans remarks that

[his] apparently irenic passage does not lack for indications of either the violence of mimetic conflict or the necessity of its deferral: interdiction, transgressive ecstasy, fracture, otherness, duality, and the slightly sinister “stabilization.” What we are “barred from” is the sacred center of the stage, the locus of sacrifice that we cannot usurp without provoking collective violence. But as Iser’s exposition shows, the aesthetic is not limited to a usurpatory wish-fulfillment. What truly produces “stabilization”–the deferral of violence that culture obtains by means of representation–is that we continue to speak to ourselves through the unreal possibility of staging. Our very humanity originates in the scenic center where we must stand in order to become users of language but that we can only ever occupy on the fictional stage of our imagination. (2000:55)The anthropological approach to known poetics works by hypothesising, after the fact, the necessary minimal conditions for its emergence as a form. This supplies not only a basis for historical schema, but also, a structural poetics adequate to these schemata.

In such a framework, the usual scholarly divisions of literary or esthetic periodisations are unlikely to hold. The usual reason for this is that they are not

sufficiently literary to offer a genuine poetics. A sound poetics should be a good device for identifying wider axiological shifts. But poetics itself has been subordinated to other ends. Thus, terms like “Elizabethan” or “Jacobean” do not mean anything in our inquiry: they reflect sociological structures superimposed onto underlying poetics of artworks of that time. Even terms like “Medieval” or “Baroque,” which seem to refer not just to monarchs or particular countries, are of limited value in this sort of inquiry. In broad brush terms, there are just three major structures of poetics: one where the sacred, ethical, and esthetic are not just indivisible, but are actually indistinguishable. This is ritual culture in the sense described by Girard. Gans says he will discuss five categories of ethic-esthetic configuration, but that these fall into “two broad groups,” both of which necessarily are distinct from Girardian ritual culture (Gans 1993:127). Gans does not, of course, stop at this broad classification. But he does offer reasoning for the limited number of esthetic systems in the world:

Insofar as the ethical systems through which human culture has evolved give rise to new forms of resentment, they require new means to accomplish its deferral; in particular, they require new esthetics. The five esthetics . . . fall into two broad groups: traditional–classical and neo-classical; and modern–romantic, modernist and postmodernist. This list is not indefinitely extensible. Finer divisions would obscure similarities in art’s relationship to its audience that cut across specific esthetic traditions. The limited number of esthetics reflects the limited number of genuinely new ethical systems in human history. (1993:127)Some of these labels seem recognizable. But we need to be careful with the associations we make. Neo-classical axiology refers not to seventeenth century esthetics indicated by a narrowly focused movement in architecture, although it does happen to include that period. Rather, it refers to the diverse revivified classicism of Aquinas, Dante, and Michelangelo as well (hence the name: neo-classical).

Gans sketches the onset of the Romantic esthetic in terms of a transition from traditional to what he calls pre-Romanticism. The neo-classical structure is such because Christianity transformed the classical esthetic by requiring dramatic significance to emerge from the locus of the scene, and crucial to this significance is the idea that there is no a priori distinction in the worthiness of those occupying the centre (151). The stage was sometimes literal. But as we have remarked above, the theorisation of the scene is a powerful innovation of Gans. And once deployed, it reveals the full axiology, not just its esthetic dimension:

The Incarnation explicitly articulates theology with anthropology; our common possession of an individual scene of representation is the sign of our common origin and the locus of our communion with the trinitary God. The new “inwardness,” the awareness of the divinely guaranteed internal scene of representation must be

incorporated into esthetic form. The center of the scene of representation contains henceforth its own self-consciousness. This is not the immanent self-consciousness of the romantic era, but it is a precursor of it. (151)11

Gans paints a picture of neo-classical axiology as moving slowly through a logic already present there from the moment of Christian conversion of Rome in the fourth century. This picture is one we will confirm by a cursory examination of Christian logics themselves (below). The French Revolution is, for most commentators, the official inauguration of Romanticism, yet as we have already indicated, we believe the progression was slower than this, and

By the time the French Revolution put a brutal end to the early modern era, the neoclassical esthetic had already all but dissolved into the preromantic. Preromanticism is new wine in old bottles. (161)We very much concur.

10. Romanticism

Romanticism is the first modern formation. It subsists still, and does so the more powerfully because so many are unaware of how it *works*. Romanticism's major innovations were many. The one that lingers most strongly, perhaps as strongly now as in the halcyon days of Romanticism, *is the attribution of meaning to an agonistically defined version of individual suffering*. It differs profoundly from the earlier value located in Christ's suffering because it arrogates that value to the everyday individual's sense of exclusion (and to this extent is derivative of the earlier sense-making system). But it does so however absurd or trivial that suffering may be and, in the postmodern era, however value-less the event that led to the suffering taking place (so victim-status can be claimed as well by a mountaineer victim who falls off, as a mudslide victim, as a victim of terrorist attack). Some victims are, of course, "real" enough (and suffering now is still suffering). But the infusion of suffering-as-sense is historical, and many are those who make meaning of the sufferings of Romantic figuration. Nor has it gone away. Subsisting still, we need to understand its genesis. Where did this figure, who finds ethical, esthetic, and moral value in his or her own status as excluded, as suffering emerge from, and why? Or: in Girardian terms, how is it that the self-styled peripheral suffering-victim is now–apparently paradoxically–celebrated as central?

Gans calls Rousseau the "father" of Romanticism (1998:75). Rousseau stands on the wrong side of the Revolution, but the claim is not exceptional (and we have made it ourselves). Gans's innovation is to insist on a transition to Romanticism via, as we have seen, "preromanticism." This approach refuses the hard-line incommensurability approach of most modern thought which, for all of its deconstructive claims, remains fond of the idea of the (Romantic) notion of the

rupture. The fact that something definitely comes into being, and has a definite origin, and can be defined in terms of when it is and is not the full version, does *not* presuppose a theory of rupture. Romanticism came slowly into being, and it subsists still. And Rousseau is a useful place to start looking for the sacred displacement from Christ into the self, the seat of soul and genius vis-à-vis the crowds, the social. Gans cites Rousseau as heralding the new:

The Rousseau figure of expulsion is the origin of romanticism's turn to the self as the true center of the scene. Seen from the romantic standpoint, neoclassicism is only an epilogue to classicism. Its need for a guarantee of centrality is reinterpreted in hindsight as an appeal to the only real source of originary intuition, the as yet peripheral self. The public scene will henceforth appear as a mere extension of the individual's internal scene of representation. From a ritual center it has been degraded to a locus of intersubjective exchange–a marketplace. (163)Gans's boldness lies not in identifying the marketplace as the "source" of an esthetic superstructure. This would be a misreading; it is in fact, a variation on a Marxist error, itself a Romantic formation whose chief distinction lies in declaring on the side of the individual's other–the social, which, en bloc, is duly construed in victimary-resentful terms. On the contrary, Gans reveals an axiology in which esthetic, ethical, and economic structures are read *anthropologically* (something we noted in an earlier essay that Friedrich Engels came close to doing, but never quite achieved).

The anthropological engine driving Romanticism is a new form of resentment. Gans puts it this way:

The Romantic lifestyle, with the predictable exception of the few radicals, suicides, and the like who took its precepts too literally, is in fact a preparation for life and career in market society. This is the constitutive hypocrisy of romanticism. (166)To make sense of these cryptic lines, we do well to recall the Girardian notion of the scapegoat. In a traditional society, the scapegoat is one who, resembling everyone else, is selected by rules, which from outside appear entirely arbitrary, then despised, and ultimately ritually destroyed by the many in order to manage mimetic crises. In the Romantic social order, the scapegoat becomes the hero.

12

The bizarre outcome is with us still. Victimage is, in modern society, a system of meaning, a way of gaining acceptance. Yet the victim has changed. Rousseau traces himself as heroically different, but does so by emphasizing the ethical rather than esthetic corner of the equilateral. A predecessor of Kant, Rousseau sought to discount all "elite" esthetics by subordinating them to the social (a move that

cultural studies scholars would make almost exactly two centuries later). But between Rousseau and the present lay the period of the one-winged budgerigar, cheeping loudly from its perch that art was for art's sake, that the artist was an unknowable and indefinable genius unconnected to any ethical or moral order. Not that some of the early Romantic heroes and heroines didn't deserve meritorious assessment of the moral value of their suffering. *Jane Eyre* is dubbed "an Autobiography" (1966:31). Its heroine has sufferings worthy of any current chatshow: she is a quasi-orphan (47-48), she sees her best friend die (114), is almost married to a man already married (319), nearly perishes in the cold (362), and finally only reconciles herself to Rochester once he has proven his suffering worthy to hers: in a fire that destroys his home, he is nearly blinded trying to save his wife (453), and in the desolation of remote woods, she can at last accept him as a worthy mate (470). Beyond the pain such events might cause, meaning is generated in a way familiar to audiences today: that is, by a catalogue of misfortunes. But Jane's suffering is also moral in an older sense. That is, the things that she stands for are related to the things she suffers; thence, her triumph is not just one over arbitrary misfortune, but is a full moral, ethical, and esthetic axiology. In the same (writerly) household, Emily Bronte generated Wuthering Heights, whose its characters, Catherine and Heathcliff, are not so morally endowed. Theirs is the genius of champion-victim of being utterly misunderstood, a status of suffering raised to the degree *that it has its own value*; its counterweight is the apotheosis of Romantic writing: the figures of madness and genius.

The legacy of this is plain enough. Gans contends that there are modern and even postmodern axiologies. Maybe so. If there are, they consist in the fact that this suffering has been democratized (modernism) and ironised and theorized (postmodernism). Yet a certain meaningful agonistic structure–the masochistic rivalry described by Girard perhaps–remains the same: the race is for victim status. It has, as Gans points out, made its sense in the marketplace, and now one can actually find lawyers whose entire business consists in no-fault claims of compensation for damages caused by past events, whether real or imaginary. Gans reads these as an effect of the market-as-axiology. For the most part, we agree. We also believe, however, that the Christian structure that propelled us from classicism through neo-classicism to Romanticism has greater force than his account makes evident. While it is a non-contradictory element in relation to Gans's outline, we believe it makes a stronger kind of sense of the axiological formations themselves.

12. The Self-Machine

The Romantic figure–be it the ancestral tall dark stranger of the eighteenth century Romance, Wordsworth's cipher on the moors collecting leeches, the brooding Dracula in his spatially displaced castle–stands defiant in the popular imagination. It

is Beethoven defying the prince with his “democratizing genius,” Wollstonecraft with her “Vindications” or the many manifesto writers (including those declaring on the side of the social, like Fourier and Cabet). We have seen how the Romantic is the apotheosis of the literary, itself a product of a crisis of folding of classical and neo-classical formations.

Romanticism is a literary formation. We say again: this opens up axiological workings still going on today, still not understood. There is no question then of a problem of definition. There is certainly no circularity of term and definition. The Romantic idiom can be defined by using its perennially recurring literary “figure” to guide us. This affords the poetics, which, once grounded in an anthropological account of the West, makes good—and frightening—sense of the present.

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Notes

1. See for instance, the right-wing commentator, A.R. Chisholm’s comment on the theatrics of Hitler’s Germany, prescient words published not after the fact, but in 1939:

Adolf Hitler’s career has been singularly like that of the hero in a tragedy; it is curious to note, in this respect, that he has a marked predilection for theatrical effects: floodlights, back-cloths resplendent with eagles and swastikas, parading choruses; a modern Siegfried slaying the dragon of communism, but with one eye on the audience . . . He undoubtedly has the heroic type of mind, the sort of mind which, like Nietzsche’s, is apt to swing you up on to romantic heights that lose their beauty only when the cold light of reason slowly begins to replace the glare of the footlights . . . human experience shows us that in the sum of things such revolt ends in disaster. (1939:51)Chisholm was a professor of French and a specialist in the symbolist Australian poet, Christopher Brennan. He understood the poetics of Romanticism very well, and he also understood its attractions–and its dangers. Would that we did so today. (back)