Revolutionary Europe, 1789-1848

Romantic Nationalism and Romantic Socialism
What is Romanticism?

Like any other –ism (Liberalism, nationalism, conservatism, radicalism, socialism, etc. etc.) “Romanticism” is a generalization. It is a word that covers many, quite disparate, phenomena. It is, in other words, a convenient shorthand (much as when people refer to “The French Revolution,” as if it were a single thing and as if there were no difference between storming the Bastille, serving on the committee that wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and being a foot soldier in the army).

Making a list of Romanticism’s defining features therefore risks obscuring important differences.

Camille Corot, *Waterfall at Terni* (1826), Metropolitan Museum, NYC.
What is Romanticism?

Nonetheless, it may be useful to think of Romanticism as:

- fascination with the power and mystery of nature (Burke’s “sublime”)
- interest in “recent” history (the Middle Ages, instead of Antiquity)
- reaction against rationalist empiricism of the Enlightenment
- celebration of the “individual,” art as self expression
- belief that art and imagination are greater powers than logic, reason

For instance, many Enlightenment writers had celebrated Isaac Newton as the founder of modern science, a great model of rational thought. Blake, however, depicts him as so fixed on the angles he draws and measures that he does not notice the beauty and strength of the rocks on which he sits.

Power and Mystery of Nature

“In Art as in Literature, there are two modes by which men can seek distinction. In the one, the Artist, intent only on the study of departed excellence, or on what others have accomplished, becomes an imitator of their work… in the other, he seeks perfection in its primitive source, NATURE.”

John Constable, Various Subjects of Landscape, 1833.

Constable’s title tells us there are people in the landscape, but we can barely see them. The clouds, not the humans, are the real action in this scene. This is a remarkable contrast with the Neo-Classical art of the 1780-1790s, in which rational human actors are the focus (as seen below).

John Constable, Hampstead Heath with Bathers (1822); Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Jacques Louis David, Death of Socrates (1787), also in the Met.
The Middle Ages

Eighteenth-century writers treated the Middle Ages (800-1400) as a long gap between the wonders of ancient Rome and the “rebirth” of reason, thought, and learning in the Renaissance. Neo-Classical artists and architects turned to Classical Greece and Rome for inspiration. In contrast, Romantics celebrated the Middle Ages as a time of greater spiritual intensity. In the aftermath of the chaos of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars (which counter-revolutionaries blamed on the Enlightenment), the Middle Ages were idealized as an era of chivalry and courtliness. In the context of the Industrial Revolution, castles and cathedrals seemed an especially appealing alternative to contemporary life.

As in the Constable landscape, the people are dwarfed in this image (both by the landscape and by the cathedral). Notice, too that the people all seem to be marching along together very harmoniously. The idealization of nature and chivalry made it possible for the Romantics to ignore social conflict, or to believe there had been none in earlier eras.

Karl Schinkel, *Medieval City on a River* (1815), National Gallery, Berlin.
Rejection of Rationalism

Many counter-revolutionaries blamed the excess and violence of the French Revolution on revolutionaries’ supposed belief in reason and rationality. In 1815, with Napoleon defeated and Louis XVIII (Louis XVI’s brother) “restored” to the French throne, many argued the Enlightenment had been a terrible mistake and the Revolution was God’s punishment.

Goya’s *Third of May*, for instance, depicts a scene from the French occupation of Spain. Notice that the light does not bring reason; people are not reading by the light, but killing by it. And by his pose and simple dress, the Spaniard who is about to be executed looks very much like Christ.

Francisco Goya, *the Third of May* (1814), Prado, Madrid.
Belief that Art and Imagination are Greater than Reason

“There is in me something that is often stronger than my body, which is often enlivened by it. In some people, the inner spark scarcely exists. I find it dominant in me. Without it, I would die, but it will consume me. … What do you think has been the life of men who have raised themselves above the common herd? Constant strife. Struggle. … because his genius clamors to be manifested. Let those who work lukewarmly be silent; what do they know of inspiration?”


Eugène Delacroix, The Death of Sardanapulus (1827), Louvre, Paris.
What is Romanticism? And how is it related to this course?

One could argue that Romanticism is a rebellion against the French Revolution.

Victor Hugo (author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, a story set in the Middle Ages, and of *Les Misérables*) famously stated that Romanticism “so many times ill defined, is nothing but Liberalism in literature”--and both do emphasize the individual.

Stendhal (French novelist, author of *The Red and the Black*) said that anything contemporary was “Romantic” (implying that in ancient Rome, togas were “Romantic” even though in his day they were “Classical”)—in other words, he was defining “Romantic” as historically specific (and Romanticism is specific to the period this course covers).
What is Romanticism? How is it related to this course? Romantic nationalism

The most obvious connection, however, is that nationalist writers and movements in the 1810s-1840s have often been considered “Romantic.” As you read Sir Walter Scott and Adam Mickiewicz, think about the ways in which their works are “Romantic” and “nationalist.”

Remember: a nation is a group of people believed to have something (history, culture, language, ethnicity, etc. etc.) in common. *Nationalism* is the political belief that because a group of people are a nation, they have the right to their own state.

Nationalism is *not* the same as “patriotism.” During their many wars, the kings of eighteenth-century Europe wanted their subjects to be patriotic—to be loyal and to pay extra, war-time taxes. But kings would never have encouraged patriotism, if they had realized it could turn into nationalism. It was the emergence of political nationalism that eventually led to monarch’s downfall. Political nationalism is the belief that a nation has the right to govern itself. The ideal form of government, in other words, is the *nation-state*.

“The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation. No body nor individual may exercise any authority which does not proceed directly from the nation.” *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, August 1789*
What is Romanticism? How is it related to this course? Romantic socialism

The socialists you are reading (Claude de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier) never considered themselves Romantics. In fact, they are more often referred to as “Utopian Socialists”—this was how Marx and Engels labeled them (in *The Communist Manifesto*). Marx and Engels meant that Fourier’s and St Simon’s versions of socialism were not realistic, that they were “utopias” (literally meaning, “nowhere”).

In the 1990s, historians started to use the term “Romantic Socialism” because it seemed to do a better job of suggesting how socialists such as Fourier, Saint Simon, and Robert Owen (important both for feminists like Anna Wheeler and for the founding of New Harmony, Indiana) were connected to other cultural and intellectual movements of their day.
As you read Saint-Simon and Fourier, consider:

what do their ideas share with “Romanticism”? with 1810-1840s nationalism?

in what ways are their philosophies different from Romanticism? from nationalism?

what legacies do you see of the French Revolution?

what place do gender roles have in their thinking about how to transform society?
Remember:

We cannot have a good discussion of these texts if you have not read them carefully and thoughtfully. Discussing texts in detail is a collaborative version of the work you need to do in your papers. Many of you are good at locating sources but you are much weaker when it comes to analyzing them. You need to practice reading and interpreting 18\textsuperscript{th}- and 19\textsuperscript{th}-cy texts. That is what we do in class.

Participation counts for 15\% of your final grade. A good grade for participation depends on making helpful contributions to discussion, listening carefully to what others say, and being able to support your interpretations (of documents or events) with evidence.

The paper due on Oct. 3 (10\% of your final grade) asks you to analyze and interpret sources.