

Some Characteristics of Romanticism: Knowledge, Reality, and Esthetics

Reality

Organicism:

The universe is alive, active, and essentially benign; it is also morally organized. This view stands in opp. to the enlightenment view of the universe as a mechanism. The universe is mystically and spiritually charged.

Knowledge

the mind is an active maker of knowledge-- **subjectivity** (Kant)

the mind is artistically attracted to the particular and the immediate, as well as the offbeat, the strange, the surprising, the unique

we come to know of ourselves and the world by contemplating **PARADOX**-- sameness in difference, life-death, many-in-one

we delight in contradiction and the tension of opposites (**dialectic**)

we **SYNTHESIZE** opposites in our mind through **symbols** and artistic creation (notice how the answers are forthcoming through art, not science)

we learn through **history** and **experience**-- the growth and development of the individual mind (cf. Frankenstein, Jane Eyre, Wordsworth's Prelude, The Mariner). It is our story that makes us who we are.

Our minds are radically free- since we create meaning, we are free to create what we want. We are not constrained by time, place, etc. (Warning: Improper use of a free mind in this wise can lead to **solipsism**, **escapism**, or **decadent estheticism**-- see WILDE, Oscar)

Esthetics (what is art? what is beauty?)

Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of emotion recollected in a moment of repose.

Art transforms the world into something else.

Art offers the viewer a version of reality that she may not have experienced before. The function of art is to give us alternatives to everyday consciousness.

The proper diction of poetry is the "language of common men."

The **sublime** is beautiful (see attached notes).

The **pastoral** is more beautiful than the urban (reaction to the Industrial Rev)

A Romantic is attracted to medieval and Elizabethan verse forms and themes.

Romantics are intrigued by folk art, folk stories, and other such "unpolished" artistic expressions.

The Artist

3 images to describe his function

"The Aeolian Harp" (wind chime) by allowing the breath of inspiration to flow through him, the artist transforms mere wind (material) into music (art).

The artist as **priest**. The artist transforms experience into symbols, much like a priest (so it is believed) transforms the bread and wine (This is going to come back with a vengeance when we get to Joyce.) The artist had a special place in society because he was fulfilling a sacred office.

The artist as **hero**: Through his creations, the artist resists the establishment. the powers that be may not like someone going around offering versions of reality where they don't fit, so they go out of their way to persecute the artist. (I MUST SUFFER FOR MY ART!)