Enlightenment, Revolution and Melancholy

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Abstract:

The chapter concentrates on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and analyzes the ambiguous project of the Enlightenment. The eighteenth century has often been depicted as an era of progress, when new scientific inventions were made and disseminated while the middle class gained more economic and political influence. The 1750s was a turning point, however, after which European intellectual history started to show darker shades and a new sceptical attitude to progress arose. At the end of the century, the Great Revolution of France brought a wave of unrest, wars and, finally, harsh manifestations of political terror. The chapter explores the heritage of the era of revolutions and its impact on the future.

The eighteenth century has often been depicted as an era of progress, when new scientific inventions were made and disseminated while the middle class gained more economic and political influence. The contemporaries of the century saw the introduction of the steam engine, Mercury thermometer, lightning rod, spinning jenny, and vaccination, to name only a few well-known examples. What is more, a new infrastructure for communication was developed based on

the circulation of newspapers and other periodicals. There were postal service and European highway network advancements, which, together with improved reading and writing skills, made private correspondence more common than before. Cafés, salons, and freemason lodges were new places of gathering for the bourgeoisie, in contrast with the earlier court culture.[1] The stock exchange disclosed many markets for public transactions, especially in the United Kingdom. Finally, the rising middle classes demanded their political rights in the American and French Revolutions.

From this point of view, the eighteenth century appears to be the Golden Age of liberalism. With the Industrial Revolution starting at the end of the eighteenth century and the introduction of the steamship and railway substantially changing the way in which people and commodities moved,[2] it might be justifiable to see a line of progress from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. The development of science, industrialization, the press, economic trade, and political freedom continued during the next century, despite some occasional obstacles. However, the 1750s can also be seen as a turning point, after which European intellectual history started to show darker shades, and a new sceptical attitude to progress arose. The Lisbon earthquake in 1755 was a setback for the optimist rationalism of the earlier Enlightenment. The American and French Revolutions could be seen as spurring the development of political progress and republicanism, but they also brought a wave of unrest, wars, and, finally, harsh manifestations of political terror in France.

In the field of literature, this change in mentality is reflected in the rise of the Gothic novel in the United Kingdom and the *Sturm und Drang* movement in the German-speaking region. The dark

side of political revolutions and industrialism was articulated during the era of Romanticism, which began in the 1790s in England and Germany. This chapter will discuss the European wave of melancholy, which started around the 1750s and culminated in the era of Romanticism (1795–1820), in order to show the complex ways in which the contemporaries related to the inauguration of modernity. It will contextualize the development from the Enlightenment to Romanticism vis-à-vis the Industrial Revolution and French Revolution.

The dark turn of the Enlightenment

In particular, the scholars writing after the Second World War have described the dark turn of the Enlightenment as an irrational 'Counter-Enlightenment', assuming that it was chiefly a German invention and that it teleologically foresaw the horrors of the fascism of the twentieth century. The concept of Counter-Enlightenment was invented by Isaiah Berlin; his interpretation was understandable in the post-war context but now appears to be an anachronistic argument based on too narrow a selection of primary sources.[3] As this chapter will show, the self-critical and sceptical views of the Enlightenment were not irrational reactions to progress. Therefore, the blind spot of Berlin's argument is not only his very schematic understanding of Romanticism as irrationalism but also his monolithic understanding of the Enlightenment as a rationalist movement.[4]

The Enlightenment was a complex, and even contradictory, project from the beginning; it is not accurate to describe it with stereotypes such as the age of rationalism or optimism, for it included many essential figures who vindicated empiricism and sentimentalism (moral sense theory)

against earlier seventeenth-century continental rationalism (i.e., René Descartes, Blaise Pascal, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz). Some French *philosophes* – Baron d'Holbach and Julien Offray de La Mettrie, for instance – promoted sceptical, nihilist, and materialist positions that are very difficult to classify under rationalism or idealism, although they promote naturalism and empiricism. According to the Greek historian of ideas Panagiotis Kondylis, the rehabilitation of empiricism, senses, and feelings was in fact the key accomplishment of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, in contrast to the seventeenth-century rationalism exemplified by Descartes and Leibniz. For example, in Voltaire's *Candide: or, Optimism* (*Candide, ou l'Optimisme*, 1759), Leibnizian professor Pangloss represents the rationalist optimism of the earlier generation, which Voltaire juxtaposed with the real-world terrors of the Seven Years' War and the Lisbon earthquake. There existed a strong empiricist current in the British Enlightenment, which was as significant as the continental Leibnizian wing represented by Christian Wolff and Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten in Germany.[5]

There are many Enlightenment thinkers – for instance, Johann Gottfried von Herder or Jean-Jacques Rousseau – who do not fit the stereotype of optimist rationalist. However, it would only increase the confusion to consider them teleologically as Counter-Enlightenment or pre-Romantic philosophers – in other words, to see them as predecessors of nineteenth-century Romanticism who simply happen to be living in the wrong century. The nineteenth-century Romantics undeniably criticized the Enlightenment, but one cannot reduce their relationship to simple dualism, such as rationalism–irrationalism, reason–feelings, liberal–conservative, or universal–historical. Sentimentalism, primitivism, or even Medievalism were not nineteenth-century inventions but originated in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[6] The rise of

industrialism in England coincided with the arousing interest in picturesque landscape, the ruins of antiquity, and the monuments and documents of the Middle Ages. It was the philosophers of the Enlightenment who invented the ideal of the noble savage, with its primitivist accusations against the overdeveloped luxury of modern culture.

It is probable that no one better represents the contradictions of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment than the Genovese author, composer, and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In the second part of his *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (*Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, 1750), Rousseau controversially argued that the invention of sciences had contributed to the moral corruption of the mankind: 'an ancient tradition passed out of Egypt into Greece, that some god, who was an enemy to the repose of mankind, was the inventor of the sciences.'[7] In a footnote, Rousseau explains that he refers here to the myth of Prometheus, whose torch was chosen as a symbol for the Enlightenment movement. We need to keep in mind that the allegorical interpretation of antiquity was a very common way of referring to contemporary issues. By retelling an ancient myth, Rousseau illustrates the harmful implications of technological progress: 'The Satyr, says an ancient fable, the first time he saw a fire, was going to kiss and embrace it; but Prometheus cried out to him to forbear, or his beard would rue it. It burns, says he, everything that touches it.'[8] Rousseau's reference to the myth of Prometheus is an apt allegory for the Enlightenment movement. As the German philosopher Hans Blumenberg has suggested, the core of the Prometheus myth is the idea of irreversibility. Once fire has been used and given to mankind, there is no going back.[9] Four years later, Rousseau elaborated the same primitivist argument in his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (*Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes*, 1754). He now argues that it is the very

perfectibility of humans that turns against them during the development of society. Civilization and technical progress certainly brought abundance to humankind, but Rousseau maintained that the more advanced the society, the more vulnerable it becomes to disasters and destructive wars.[10]

This ambiguous relationship with the past was also reflected in the Gothic novel, the cult of ruins, and the antiquarian interest in archaeological and historical remains that was developing in the latter half of the eighteenth century.[11] In 1748, Spanish military engineer Rocque Joaquín de Alcubierre (1702–1780) accidentally found Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were destroyed in the eruption of Vesuvius. Giovanni Battista Piranesi's drawings and Johann Joachim Winckelmann's art historical studies depicted the lost world of antiquity based on these findings. After the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, aesthetics required a new concept to analyze nature's agency. Edmund Burke used the concept of the 'sublime' to explain the aesthetics of natural disasters, darkness, and even political terror.[12] Some Enlightenment philosophers, such as Immanuel Kant in Germany, argued idealistically that the sublime was in fact an effect of the human mind and thereby provided indirect proof of our noumenal nature, which implied that there was no teleological agent working behind natural forces. Kant also emphasized that a person must be himself or herself in safety in order to judge a catastrophic event sublime.[13]

However, despite Kant's critical efforts, there developed a new taste that celebrated the nonhuman agency of nature: the hostile surroundings of the Alps, ancient cities destroyed in earthquakes, and churning seas and shipwrecks were now admired as aesthetic spectacles. Moreover, Gothic fiction charted the unconsciousness, sexual drives, and evil inside the human

mind. Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is often considered the first Gothic novel, while Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) were the bestsellers of the genre and attracted wide attention. Similarly, Friedrich Schiller's *The Ghost-Seer* (*Der Geisterseher*, 1787–89) was one of his most-read publications in his lifetime, although he is now much better known for his classical plays and poetry.

Obviously, not everyone was enthusiastic about the Gothic: Kant called the medieval Gothic taste of Nordic people perverted and grotesque.[14] Magnificent, obscure, and potentially dangerous objects evoked the sublime experience typical of Gothic horror. In contrast with the harmonious beauty fitting rational limits, the sublime was a sign of excess that escaped the rational capacity of the human mind.[15] Some nihilist Enlightenment philosophers, such as the Marquis de Sade, were interested in the presentation of the dark side of humanity in Gothic fiction. Strikingly, de Sade explains the birth of the Gothic novel as a fruit of revolutionary terror: terror and violence were an understandable reaction to the most grotesque events of contemporary history.[16] At the turn of the nineteenth century, Robertson's (Étienne-Gaspard Robert, 1763–1837) *Fantasmagoria* illustrated the horrible events of the Revolution by using a Fantoscope (a magic lantern on wheels) to project 'wavering images of ghosts and deceased tyrants'.[17] Again, the audience of the spectacle could experience the sublime events of contemporary history from a safe distance. As said in the introduction, the present scholarship no longer interprets these developments as a teleological sign of pre-Romanticism but, rather, as aspects of the Enlightenment. This is not to say that Gothic horror did not influence Romanticism, because it obviously did, but that its origin is in the contradictions present in eighteenth-century culture.[18]

As the case of the sublime exemplifies, the key problem of the Enlightenment was the tension between naturalism and human freedom. The scientific revolution led to the naturalist conclusion that everything in nature was causally determined: there had to be a sufficient reason for all things. Conversely, the Enlightenment emphasized human agency and its political implications. As illustrated by Kant's problems with regard to adapting together the first and second critiques, the causal necessity and the freedom of will were difficult to combine without returning to Cartesian dualism. In Germany, this contradiction of the Enlightenment escalated in the pantheism controversy of the 1780s. Consequent monism and naturalism threatened freedom, whereas the noumenal essence of man appeared supernatural for some philosophers.[19] Kant's solution was to advocate transcendental idealism, whereby naturalism and morality could be seen as two different perspectives of the same world. The Romantic generation used these arguments against Kant's intentions to conclude that there was no pre-given reality, because all human experience was necessarily filtered through space and time, the categories of understanding, and linguistic discourses. Furthermore, the Romantic generation temporalized this contradiction by arguing that the French Revolution and industrialism caused a rupture between the lost premodernity and the alienated present.

Industrial and political revolution

The latter part of the eighteenth century was an era of revolutions in science, politics, and technology. The subject for the French Academy's annual competition in 1737 was the nature of fire. Although combustion belongs among the oldest inventions of mankind, what fire was and

how it spread was still a mystery for natural scientists. Voltaire and Émilie du Châtelet (1706–1749) investigated this using experiments and proved that fire had weight.[20] A modern-day Prometheus, Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier replaced the old phlogiston theory with oxygen, a chemical element that explained the chemical process behind combustion. Lavoisier recognized and named oxygen in 1778. This was among the crucial steps in the early modern natural philosophy that studied the qualities of the quantitative paradigm of modern science: fire was no longer seen as a basic element but, rather, as a chemical reaction between oxygen and a fuel. Despite his scientific success, Lavoisier's situation became problematic after the French Revolution: he belonged to various aristocratic councils of the *ancien régime*, including the notorious tax office *Ferme générale*, because of which he became a victim of the revolutionary terror and was guillotined in 1794. German Romantic author Friedrich Schlegel probably had similar events in mind when he characterized the French Revolution 'as the most frightful grotesque of the age, where the most profound prejudices and their most brutal punishments are mixed up in a fearful chaos and woven as bizarrely as possible into a monstrous human tragicomedy.'[21] This led Schlegel to describe the age of the French Revolution as a chemical era of violent and surprising reactions in *Athenäum* magazine in 1798.[22]

The invention of chemistry through the understanding of combustion occurred in connection with the Industrial Revolution. The burning of fossil fuels was the necessary condition of the steam engine that led to the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in England. This is another process that was impossible to reverse, although the contemporaries, such as British Romantic poet and artist William Blake, were already aware of the potentially dire effects of 'these dark Satanic mills' on the environment.[23] In *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Mary

Shelley associated Victor Frankenstein, an ambitious scientist producing a technological invention that breaks loose to destroy humanity, with the figure of Prometheus, referring to Rousseau's allegory 70 years before. Moreover, the sentimental descriptions of Victor's happy childhood in Geneva paraphrase sections of Rousseau's nostalgic description of the pristine Alpine nature in *Julie, or the New Heloise* (*Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761) showing continuity from the sentimentalism of the Enlightenment to nineteenth-century Romanticism.

Considering that the Romantic cult of nature is often associated with the history of ecocriticism and the conservation of nature, it is an interesting fact that many German Romantic authors were either educated in geology or even worked in the service of the mining industry. The actual Industrial Revolution happened relatively late in Germany, although the German mining industry had medieval roots. For example, the Romantic poet Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) worked as a mining engineer, and geological motifs are typical in his works, especially in the posthumously published *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800). Novalis's novel clearly idealizes the medieval practice of mining in Germany.[24] In contrast, E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Mines of Falun* (*Die Bergwerke zu Falun*, 1819) described the harsh reality of the mining shaft, comparing it with Hell on Earth.[25]

Rousseau had warned about the double-edged nature of Promethean technology, but ironically, his own political philosophy contributed to the political emancipation project of the late eighteenth century. This development culminated in the French Revolution in 1789, which certainly brought with it as much terror as deliverance. In addition to technology, the image of Prometheus referred to the idea of rebellion against authorities and religion in the late eighteenth

century. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, one of the key authors of *Sturm und Drang*, wrote the poem 'Prometheus' (1774), which describes a rebellion against religion and Zeus, the leader of Olympian deities.[26] The origin of this reference was Shaftesbury's (Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury) *Soliloquy or Advice to an Author* (1710), in which Promethean poets are called the second maker after God.[27] Yet, the idea of rebellious genius is not a sign of pre-Romantic protest, but it is clearly related to the criticism of authority that is typical of the Enlightenment.[28] In addition to technological progress and the aesthetic rebellion of *Sturm und Drang*, the character of Prometheus was associated with the abolition of slavery. Treated badly by his Dutch owner, a black slave in Voltaire's *Candide* refers to Prometheus, who was chained to Mount Caucasus.[29]

It should be noted that the German reception of the French Revolution was ambivalent and often more cultural than properly political. From a political perspective, German states still formed only an aggregate consisting of a network of small principalities and cities that shared the same culture and language. They had no parliamentary system, political parties, nor even a strict separation between political, theological, and moral discourses.[30] Fifteen years before the French Revolution, German cultural life had already seen the wave of youthful rebellion that was called *Sturm und Drang*. Among its most famous works is Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*, 1774). In one of the key scenes in the novel, Werther visits a friend but encounters a gathering of aristocrats at his house. Because Werther is not a nobleman, he is asked to leave. The novel shows the hidden tension in German society, where the rising middle classes had gained economic influence, but not the same social recognition as the nobility.

Especially after the start of the French Revolution, printing activity in Germany was regulated, but in spite of this, references to the French events were very common in literary and cultural magazines. The early Romantic author Friedrich Schlegel was first excited about the political possibilities of the French events. He worked in close co-operation with Caroline Böhmer (later the spouse of his brother, August Wilhelm), who was influential in the short-lived Republic of Mainz. As Friedrich Schlegel's 'Essay on the Concept of Republicanism' ('Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus', 1796) shows, Schlegel even considered as a relevant option the possibility of violent insurrection against political tyranny.[31] The text was printed in the radical *Deutschland* magazine, edited by Johann Friedrich Reichardt, who was a known supporter of the French Revolution and the democratic constitution. Reichardt's magazine had constant difficulties with censorship and was suspended by the authorities, but Reichardt founded a new literary magazine called *Lyceum der schönen Künste*, in which Friedrich Schlegel published his first Romantic collection of fragments. Only a year later, Friedrich founded his own Romantic magazine, *Athenäum* (1798–1800), together with his brother August Wilhelm. This shows the way in which the Romantic generation embraced periodicals, the media of the Enlightenment, as the channel of their literary views and social opinions.

However, Schlegel's relationship to the actual events of the Revolution ~~was already~~became more moderate than before~~in 1798~~ when he started to pay more attention to the political terror connected with it. In 1800, Schlegel moved to Paris, which made him even more conscious of the everyday effects of the Revolution. Travelling to Paris to witness the new situation after the Revolution was a typical topos among the Romantic generation in general. In addition to

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Schlegel, William Wordsworth and Swedish-Finnish Frans Michael Franzén (1772–1847) were all disappointed after seeing the harsh reality of post-revolutionary France.[32] This led to a conservative turn among many Romantics, although some – for example, P. B. Shelley – remained loyal to the republican cause even in the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The rise of Romanticism at the turn of the nineteenth century becomes understandable in the context of the industrial and political revolutions. In particular, High Romanticism often celebrated the ideas of naturality and national originality, and in a sense, this could be seen as a critical answer to the industrial utilization of nature and 'artificially' made state borders during the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815). Among the key ideas of the early Romantic cultural theory was that there was two kinds of poetry: artificial and natural. The former was based on classical rules of the learned elite, whereas the latter was an expression of unconscious nature and folk. In *Dialogue on Poetry* (*Gespräch über die Poesie*, 1800), Friedrich Schlegel argues that nature can produce poetry too:

> And what are they [poems], compared with the unformed and unconscious poetry which stirs in the plants and shines in the light, smiles in a child, gleams in the flower of youth, and glows in the loving bosom of woman? This, however, is the primeval poetry without which there would be no poetry of words. Indeed, there is and never has been for us humans any other object or source of activity and joy but that one poem of the godhead the earth of which we, too, are part and flower.[33]

Schlegel's theoretical framework is based on the pantheist idea that humans are part of nature too, and, hence, the original creative activity is based on the realization of nature's creative potential. The creative powers of nature are unconscious, naïve, and feminine, in contrast to the artificial poetry of masculine authors. Later in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, Schlegel explicitly connects his metaphysics of poetry to Baruch Spinoza's monism, according to which creative human activity originates in nature's productive powers. The Greek etymology of poetry is *poiesis*, which means production and creation.

The Romantic oxymoron 'natural culture' was widespread during European Romanticism, and it had connections with the Herderian criticism of colonialism and artificially created empires that consisted of smaller nations. For example, the Swedish-Finnish Romantic critic Fredrick Cygnaeus (1807–1881) argued that Franzén's poetry is a product of nature. In Franzén's works, the Herderian argument about the originality of indigenous peoples and their poetry was used for anticolonial purposes. Franzén's *Emili eller en afton i Lapland* (*Emili, or an Evening in Lapland*, 1802) is set in Lapland, an area of indigenous Sami people that is scattered across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. In Franzén's *Emili*, Thor and Assa, both of whom are Sami, are kidnapped by a European circus group that travels to Germany and exhibits them with their reindeers as if they are exotic animals. Thor manages to escape over to the border with the French Republic, where he fights for the revolutionary cause.[34] Franzén's discussion of the noble savage myth is similar to *Atala, ou Les Amours de deux sauvages dans le desert* (1801) by François-René de Chateaubriand. In Romanticism, the local culture of peripheries was seen as an intrinsic value, in contrast to the universalism of empires and the globalism of the market centres. However, one must keep in mind that the noble savage figure was already widespread in

the literature of the Enlightenment, as exemplified by Denis Diderot's *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (*Addendum to the Journey of Bougainville*, 1796).[35]

Although Romanticism in general was related to the rehabilitation of nature and ethnic originality, the early theoretical framework of German Romanticism in particular was more complex than simply the fetishism of authenticity. For example, in Schlegel's *Dialogue on Poetry*, the Romantic understanding of poetry as the Orphic original language of nature is soon complicated by his interest in Promethean artificial poetry – the idea of the poet as a conscious creator of artificial inventions.[36] When introducing his project on new mythology, Schlegel now emphasizes that the artificiality of poetry will be necessary in modernity. The ancient mythology of the Greeks was produced unconsciously, but the modern Romantic mythology must be a conscious project from the beginning:

> For it [mythology] will come to us by an entirely opposite way from that of previous ages, which was everywhere the first flower of youthful imagination, directly joining and imitating what was most immediate and vital in the sensuous world. The new mythology, in contrast, must be forged from the deepest depths of the spirit; it must be the most artful [*künstlichste aller Kunstwerke*] of all works of art[.][37]

Schlegel's characterization is based on German author Friedrich Schiller's distinction between naïve (objective) and sentimental (subjective) poetry. The ancients had been naïve, but the moderns could be only sentimental, because one could never return to the past stage of naiveté after it was lost. The ancient poetry was objective in the sense that the ancients simply imitated

nature, but it was also naïve because ~~it was~~the ancients were not conscious of the agency of the subject. The modern poetry, in contrast, is sentimental, because its key theme is the longing for the lost unity with nature. Conversely, sentimental poetry is more reflective, because it assumes that the subject constructs an image of the lost harmony in nature.[38] The sentimental attitude is, thus, typical of the modern era, which understood itself as alienated from the assumed past harmony. Schiller refers to the industrial mentality and distribution of work as a source of modern alienation, ~~reminding again of~~resembling Rousseau's primitivism.[39]

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Nevertheless, the melancholy became deeper during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and Late Romanticism brought about a conservative turn, especially after the Napoleonic Wars. Many contemporaries already considered the French Revolution as the border that separated the past from the present. The French Revolution, and the wars following it, meant such a fundamental change in political conditions and state borders that Europe was never the same after its occurrence. As Schlegel argued, 'The historian is a prophet facing backwards.'[40] That is to say, history can be written only after the events have unfolded, but historical time itself is irreversible, which is the explanation for the European-wide wave of Romantic melancholy that was felt after the changes of the French Revolution.

The ambiguities of Romantic melancholy

The final section of this chapter will discuss the rise of Romanticism from the point of view of melancholy. The idea of 'melancholy' has a long history prior to Romanticism. Originally, *melancholia* (*μέλαινα χολή*) was one of the four temperaments matching the four humours of

ancient humoralism. Exemplified by Albrecht Dürer's famous engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), it was a popular belief system in the early modern period. Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) analyzed the subject from both a literary and a medical point of view. In the nineteenth century, *melancholia* still had a medical meaning, referring to both a mental and a physical state of depression, but it also became a literary fashion after Edward Young's poem *Night Thoughts* (1742–1745). Young's influence was significant for German *Sturm und Drang* and is visible in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. The echoes of Young's influence was heard in Finland, as exemplified by Frans Michael Franzén's remark during his tour of Western Europe from 1795 to 1796. Franzén describes deep nocturnal melancholy inspired by Young: seeing the sublime ruins of Falkenburg Castle in the darkness of night even led him to play with the idea of committing suicide there someday.[41] Furthermore, William Shakespeare's plays provided another impetus for the Romantic melancholy. August Wilhelm Schlegel had been working with a new translation of *Hamlet* (1602) since the 1790s, and his brother, Friedrich Schlegel, analyzed melancholic Prince Hamlet as a picture of the modern man who was incapable of making decisions.[42] Finally, the Romantic cult of night and death culminated in *Hymns to the Night* (*Hymnen an die Nacht*, 1800) by Novalis, which was inspired by the early death of his tubercular fiancée, Sophie, and presented the afterlife as a way in which the lovers could be reunited. In 1801, 29-year-old Novalis died from the same disease and consolidated the Romantic myth of a poet sacrificing himself.

Despite these dark tones, early German Romanticism was often optimistic about the future. For example, 'On Incomprehensibility' ('Über die Unverständlichkeit', 1800), an essay by Friedrich Schlegel that concluded the final number of *Athenäum*, declares the following:

> The new age is heralding itself as fleet of foot and winged of sole; the dawn has put on seven-league boots. For a long time now a storm has been brewing on the horizon of poesy. … Soon, however, one will no longer be able to speak of a single storm. Instead, the entire sky will burn in one flame, and then all of your little lightning rods won't help you. The nineteenth century will indeed begin, and then every little mystery regarding the unintelligibility of the *Athenäum* will be solved.[43]

Admittedly, Friedrich Schlegel's description of a utopian future has ironic tones: he uses the metaphor of the 'storm' and the metonym of the 'lightning rod' to depict the rise of new Romantic poetry as an upheaval of German cultural life of which sparkle has such a high voltage that the Enlightenment's 'lightning rod' cannot handle its energy. After the storm of the Romantic literature, the beginning of the next century is 'dawn', a new morning of humanity, argues Schlegel. The irreversibility of time slowly replaced the cyclical notion of history as an organic development whereby the Golden Age returns periodically. Voltaire had still maintained that although science could progress endlessly, poetry always encountered a certain limit, after which it degenerated.[44] Schlegel's famous definition of Romantic literature as 'progressive universal poetry' should be seen as a polemical argument against this earlier cyclical understanding of history.[45] However, the linear understanding of history also implied that the primal Golden Age could no longer return, because this would again imply cyclicity.

Despite Friedrich Schlegel's utopian optimism, Romanticism often had darker shades, and they became deeper, especially after the Napoleonic Wars raged in Europe. The Romantic elegiac

notion of history was based on the conviction that the past could never return. Although many Romantics advocated republican politics, especially in the 1790s, High Romanticism is characterized by the longing for the lost national past. Friedrich Schlegel also contributed to the nostalgic melancholy triggered by the ruins of the past after the Revolution. He described the Rhenish landscape filled with the ruins of medieval castles, feeling deep melancholy for the remains of a bygone past. Schlegel, who had been a revolutionary republican in his youth, represented a typical experience of the time: after the Napoleonic Wars, he became a political conservative, cherishing the remains of the German past. When visiting Paris in 1804, Schlegel described with horror the destruction of the Basilica of Saint Denis in the aftermath of the Great Revolution:

> [T]he deep silent melancholy it inspires becomes stronger and more profound in approaching this ancient and now ruined cathedral. Every part that could be destroyed without too much labour and difficulty has been thrown down; the naked walls alone are left standing, with the massy pillars and the arches that rest upon them. As the doors were opened, a host of jackdaws and rooks, the sole inhabitants of the desecrated sanctuary, took flight, and when the dust they raised in their departure had subsided, we saw the uptorn graves of the sovereigns of France[.][46]

His disappointment with the results of the revolution explains Schlegel's sudden political turn from radicalism to restoration.

As Peter Fritzsche maintains in *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (2004), the contemporaries of the French Revolution understood themselves as the heirs of a completely new period of history. The Romantic melancholy was based on the experience of disconnectedness from the irretrievably lost past and worries related to the unknown future.[47] In addition to the Middle Ages, ancient Greece was an important setting for Romantic poetry. *Ode on Melancholy* (1819) by John Keats associated melancholy with lost Greece and the oblivion of modernity. The poem's first stanza refers to the myth of Lethe, a river in Hades; those who drink from Lethe experience complete forgetfulness. Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1820) elaborates the theme in relation to the lost world of antiquity, which can still be remembered in the silence of the material remains that have survived.[48]

The French Romantic author François-René de Chateaubriand compared the French Revolution with 'the river of blood which separates forever the old world, which you are leaving, from the new world'.[49] In Chateaubriand's view, revolution was a rupture that separated the past from the present.[50] His loosely autobiographical novella *René* (1802) was a bestseller about an aristocrat who is not satisfied with modernity and feels melancholy for the lost world. René's travels in Europe both followed and established the itineraries of Romantic melancholy that authors such as Lord Byron followed after him. Because Romanticism celebrated the local identity of places, I will focus on the typical sites of Romantic melancholy using *René* as an example.[51]

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Figure 1. A map of toponyms and their textual contexts in Chateaubriand's René *(1802). Asko Nivala*

Figure 1 presents a reconstruction of the map implied in the text of *René*. The place names are embedded with their textual contexts to show Chateaubriand's interpretations of the places. The toponym 'Europe' is located around the Netherlands, because, as a region, it cannot be represented with a point, while the American places are on the smaller map. The map shows the way in which the sites of Romantic melancholy are often located on the periphery. René visits the northern parts of Scotland, the location of *Ossian* (1760), while also climbing Mount Etna in Sicily, combining peripheral places in both the north and south. Rome is also a very typical destination of Romantic narratives, combined with a tour of the Greek ruins. Although Rome can be considered an urban centre, René sees it through its art and history. It is remarkable that in many Romantic narratives, both Italy and Greece are represented as ancient places without any references to their contemporary histories, although Italy was an important battle scene in the Napoleonic Wars and Greece was still part of the Ottoman Empire. René also moves on an exceptionally wide horizontal axis, because its frame narrative is located in the remoteness of Louisiana.

The feeling of melancholy presupposes an experience of distance and loss. As these Romantic examples have shown, this distance can be either temporal or spatial. The French Revolution, scientific development, and the beginning of industrialization were a point of rupture, after which history was never the same. Moreover, economic progress increased the division of regions into core and periphery. According to the eighteenth-century colonial attitude, the

periphery was often seen only as a source of raw materials, which were then transported to core cities for refinement and sale.[52] Although Romanticism has sometimes been confused with a naïve nostalgia for the past, the Romantic melancholy aroused a new interest in nature, historical environments, and the original cultures of economically underdeveloped regions. As has been said, many of these sceptical features were already present during the Enlightenment, which was not ignorant about the complexities of progress.

Conclusion

The dark turn of the Enlightenment in the second part of the eighteenth century elucidates why there are good reasons to conclude that the age of the Enlightenment was too complex an era to be reduced to any single idea, be it rationalism or a belief in progress. In contrast to seventeenth-century rationalism, many key thinkers of the Enlightenment were empiricists and were sceptical of the ideas of theodicy or optimism. The aesthetic fashion of the sublime and Gothic fiction were in fact integral parts of the age of the Enlightenment, although nineteenth-century Romanticism might have sometimes radicalized these developments.

The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the United Kingdom and the political revolution in France provided the historical contexts in which nineteenth-century Romanticism developed. The European-wide wave of melancholy was related to these political, social, and ecological issues. Although especially early Romanticism was often progressive, optimist, and republican, the Napoleonic Wars were the point after which the interest of many Romantics turned towards the lost national past. However, like Rousseau before them, the Romantics were conscious about

the impossibility of regaining the past Golden Age (if there ever even was one). Moreover, the Romantic nostalgia had a spatial element in addition to temporal references: there were specific sites of melancholy that were constructed in the Romantic narratives that spatialized the past to the peripheries of Europe, such as Scotland or the ruins of ancient Rome and Greece, while presenting England and France as the locations of the present misery.

The rise of the Gothic novel, Romanticism, and melancholy can all be regarded as symptoms of alienation against a rapidly modernising society. Although the eighteenth century was a time of economic and scientific breakthroughs, melancholy was fashionable among people in their early adulthood. Long before Karl Marx and the Frankfurt School, Friedrich Schiller argued in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, 1794) that the modern division of labour was the cause of human beings' alienation from each other. He writes about the lot of modern human:

> Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge.[53]

Although the Romantic ideal of the organic society later gained a conservative stain, it was originally developed as a critical alternative to the modern specialization of work, which had resulted in the disintegration of knowledge and the mechanization of human relationships. Because of these political implications, early Romanticism in particular shared many critical

postulates with the Promethean rebel of *Sturm und Drang* and the Enlightenment. It was not until Late Romanticism that the conservative trend became dominant, which designated a transition whereby the Romantic counterculture slowly transformed from a youthful mutiny to a conservative ideology that supported the status quo and was written by officially appointed national poets.

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[2] See J. Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. P. Camiller, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014.

[3] See I. Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999, 46–47 and passim. Robert E. Norton has shown the problems of Berlin's reading. R.E. Norton, 'The Myth of the Counter-Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, 2007, 635–58.

[4] See A. Nivala, 'Critique and Naturalism: Friedrich Schlegel and the Principles of the Enlightenment', in C. Wolff, T. Kaitaro and M. Ahokas (eds.), *The Enlightenment: Critique, Myth, Utopia: Proceedings of Symposium Arranged by the Finnish Society for Eighteenth-century Studies in Helsinki, 17–18 October 2008*, Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2011, 203–19.

[5] P. Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2002, 20–21.

[6] Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*, 21; H.R. Jauß, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1967, 40–42, 69.

[7] J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole, London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1923, <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/638>.

[8] Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*.

[9] H. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. R.M. Wallace, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985, 223, 301.

[10] J.-J. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. D.A. Cress, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992, 78. In the supplements for the second edition of *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, Rousseau moderated his primitivist criticism of modernity and reminded that it would be impossible to leave the modern civilization behind and 'return to live in the forest to live with bears'. Ibid., 80.

[11] W.D. Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany: A Chapter in the History of Taste*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

[12] A. Nivala, 'Catastrophic Revolution and the Rise of Bildung', in H. Salmi, A. Nivala and J. Sarjala (eds.), *Travelling Notions of Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2016, 19–37.

[13] I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. W.S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987, 121–23.

[14] Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany*, 11.

[15] F. Botting, *Gothic*, London: Routledge, 1996, 38–43.

[16] A. Wright, *Gothic Fiction*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 64. On de Sade's place in the Enlightenment, see P. Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*, 509–18.

[17] J. Tresch, *The Romantic Machine: Utopian Science and Technology after Napoleon*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Kindle Edition, Ch. 5.

[18] On the complex relationship between Gothic fiction and British Romanticism, see especially M. Gamer, *Romanticism and the Gothic: Genre, Reception, and Canon Formation*, Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Cf. Robson-Scott, *The Literary Background of the Gothic Revival in Germany*, 34–35.

[19] Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*; F. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.

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[21] F. Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971, 88 (*Athenäum-Fragment* No. 424.).

[22] See A. Nivala, 'Chemical Age: Presenting History with Metaphors', in B. Johnson and H. Kiiskinen (eds.), *They Do Things Differently There: Essays on Cultural History*, Turku: k & h, 2011, 81–108.

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[25] H. I. Sullivan, 'Dirty Nature: Ecocriticism and Tales of Extraction-Mining and Solar Power in Goethe, Hoffmann, Verne, and Eschbach', *Colloquia Germanica* 44, 2011, 111–31.

[26] Goethe wrote 'Prometheus' between the years 1772 and 1774, but it was published anonymously by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi in 1785. Lessing's reading of the poem started the famous *Pantheismstreit* (Pantheism Controversy). See Beiser, *The Fate of Reason*, 65.

[27] See O. Walzel, *Das Prometheussymbol von Shaftesbury zu Goethe*, München: Max Hueber Verlag, 1932; M.-G. Dehrmann, *Das 'Orakel der Deisten': Shaftesbury und die deutsche Aufklärung*, Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008.

[28] Jauß, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, 69.

[29] E. Hall, *Ancient Slavery and Abolition: From Hobbes to Hollywood*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 213; J. Hickman, *Black Prometheus: Race and Radicalism in the Age of Atlantic Slavery*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2017, 90.

[30] See Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis*.

[31] See F. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Bd. 7*, ed. Ernst Behler et al., Paderborn: Schöningh, 1966, 11–25.

[32] Nivala, 'Catastrophic Revolution and the Rise of Bildung', 28; H. Rantala, 'Nordic Travellers between the Centres and Peripheries of Civilisation', in H. Salmi, A. Nivala and J. Sarjala (eds.), *Travelling Notions of Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century Europe*, New York: Routledge, 2016, 96–112.

[33] F. Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. E. Behler and R. Struc, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968, 54.

[34] P. Lassila, *Runoilija ja rumpali: Luonnon, ihmisen ja isänmaan suhteista suomalaisen kirjallisuuden romanttisessa perinteessä*, Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2000, 22–26.

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[36] On the distinction between Orphic and Promethean Romanticism, see A. Nivala, *The Romantic Idea of the Golden Age in Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophy of History*, New York: Routledge, 2017, Ch. 2; P. Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. M. Chase, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006, 91–100.

[37] Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, 81–82.

[38] Nivala, *The Romantic Idea of the Golden Age in Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophy of History*, Ch. 4, Section 'Tragedy as play'.

[39] F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters*, trans. E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, Oxford: Clarendon, 1968.

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[43] F. Schlegel, 'On Incomprehensibility', *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings*, trans. J. Schulte-Sasse et al., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, 126.

[44] Nivala, *The Romantic Idea of the Golden Age in Friedrich Schlegel's Philosophy of History*, Ch. 6.

[45] Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175 (*Athenäum-Fragment* no. 116).

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[49] F. de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, trans. A.S. Kline, Book V, Ch. 7, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Chateaubriand/ChateaubriandMemoirsBookV.htm>.

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[52] See, F. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, London: Verso, 2013.

[53] F. Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters* (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*), trans. E.M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby, Oxford: Clarendon, 1968 (1794), 35.