

A painting of a man in a wide-brimmed hat looking out over a landscape with ancient ruins.

JOURNEY TO ITALY: Framing the Romantics

September 27, 2020

Chateaubriand

- François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) was a French writer, politician, diplomat and historian who had a notable influence on French literature of the nineteenth century.
- Chateaubriand traveled to America in 1791 and wrote a travel narrative, *Voyage en Amérique* (1826), as well as exotic novels set in the Americas: *Les Natchez* (written between 1793 and 1799 but published only in 1826), *Atala* (1801) and *René* (1802).
 - *René* was very impactful on the Romantic movement, much like Goethe's *Werther*



Goethe and Chateaubriand

- What do Goethe's letters and Chateaubriand's have in common?
- Consider Goethe's final contemplation of Rome upon departure (pp. 496-497) and Chateaubriand's "Walk through Rome, by Moonlight."
 - Moonlight
 - Ruins
 - Solitude
 - History
 - Magical air
 - Sublime elements
 - Mingling of images of women and the city
- What could we say the final effect of all these elements is? Especially as it relates to Romanticism or Aesthetic theory?



LEL [Letitia Elizabeth Landon] (1802 –1838)

- As the Romantics were cultural revolutionaries, so did they attempt to revolutionize gender and sexuality
- Some argue that the 19th century was a moment of the Creation of Gender, a reification of gender roles
 - For example, there is the upper-middle class woman's 'retreat to the home' as her proper domestic setting now that she no longer needs to work to earn for the family.
- Some argue that it was a time of great experimentation, for example in Romantic writing
- Indeed, it was perhaps both. The Romantics certainly were experimenting with both sexuality and writing about sexuality and we see gender norms affected as well, as women writers burgeoned in the Romantic period (The Bronte's, Jane Austen, women poets like LEL, Mary Robinson, etc.)



LEL [Letitia Elizabeth Landon] (1802 –1838)

- She is considered a borderland writer between Romantic and Victorian
- She never went to Italy, yet her first poem was called 'Rome'
- She is famous for her long poem 'L'improvisatrice'
 - It references how influential Madame de Staél and *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) were to her and to women writers of the 19th century

- Napoleon exiled Germaine de Staél and she used that 10-year period in Italy to research and write *Corinne*.
- The book was extremely popular and influential across Europe.
- Scholar Diane Hoevler, argues that de Staél's major accomplishment "was to invent not just a female character, but a female romanticism capable of rivaling in its performative potential the dominant male discourses of Romanticism."
- Corinne, a personification of Italy, as seen in the title, is a liberated and talented *improvisatrice* during her time in Italy. However, when she arrives in England at the end of the novel, she is exposed to conventions and constraints that undermine and ultimately destroy her health and happiness.
- This influential work convinced a generation of Romantic women writers that Italy was a promised land for female individualism.
- That which was not allowed locally, in Great Britain, could be imagined as occurring at a distance, in Italy.

Corinne, ou L'Italie (1807)





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 - It references how influential Madame de Staél and *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) were to her and to women writers of the 19th century
- Landon’s journeys are all ‘metaphorical’, she travels in her poetry to Italy even though she never physically traveled there because, since the publication of *Corinne*, Italy was perceived as a freely expressive space and a space where women, particularly, were more free to access education and to express themselves.



LEL [Letitia Elizabeth Landon] (1802 –1838)

- According to LEL, in what precisely does Rome's value lie in the 19th century?
- For whom does she imply that value is accessible?



Stendhal

- Marie Henri Beyle (1783-1842), he was a writer but also a military man, part of Napoleon's army
- Best known for the novels *Le Rouge et le Noir* (1830) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839)
- Stendhal was the first Frenchman to call himself *un romantique*
- He was also the first writer to use the term 'tourist' as it is used today, in *Mémoires d'un touriste*.
- He is considered one of the first exponents of novelistic 'realism' and an early introduction of modern analyses of his characters' psychology.
- Stendhal was a part of the nascent liberal movement and, while staying in Italy, which he found a 'more sincere and passionate country' than France, he became convinced that Romanticism was essentially the literary counterpart of liberalism in politics.
 - That is, they were both modern revolutions focused on the individual and freedom of expression.



Stendhal Syndrome

It is an illness or affliction named after Stendhal who described his experience in 1817 while visiting Florence in his book *Naples and Florence: A Journey from Milan to Reggio*.

While at the Basilica of Santa Croce (where Niccolò Machiavelli, Michelangelo and Galileo Galilei are buried), he was so overcome with emotion that he wrote:

- I was in a sort of ecstasy, from the idea of being in Florence, close to the great men whose tombs I had seen. Absorbed in the contemplation of sublime beauty ... I reached the point where one encounters celestial sensations ... Everything spoke so vividly to my soul. Ah, if I could only forget. I had palpitations of the heart, what in Berlin they call 'nerves'. Life was drained from me. I walked with the fear of falling.

Doctors and nurses at Florence's hospitals are accustomed to tourists suffering from dizzy spells or disorientation after viewing the statue of David, the artworks of the Uffizi Gallery, and other historic relics of the Tuscan city.

Promenades dans Rome (A Roman Journal, 1829)

- What is the tone of Stendhal's guide?
- How is Stendhal's guide/journal similar to/different from Goethe's?



- “Errors there shall surely be, but I shall tell the truth!” 2
- “All the anecdotes contained in this volume are true, or at least this author believes them to be so.” 2
- “we reveled in the good fortune of being in Rome in complete freedom, and *without thinking of the duty of seeing.*” 9
- “I should say this to travelers: On arriving to Rome, do not let yourself be poisoned by any opinion; do not buy any book. The time of curiosity and of science will only too soon replace that of emotion; take lodgings in the Via Gregoriana or, at least, on the third story of some house on the Piazza Venezia, at the end of the Corse; flee from the sight, and even more the contact, of the curious.” 12
- “The moment other sightseers come to the Colosseum, the traveler’s pleasure is almost entirely eclipsed.” 16
 - Can’t be “carried away by the sublime.” 16

Reading Questions

- Edmund Burke in his 1757 treatise on the Beautiful and Sublime wrote:
 - “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime.”
- How, then, can we conceive of Gothic literature as engaging aesthetic theory about the experience of the Sublime?
- Immanuel Kant defined two sorts of ‘sublime’, the mathematical and the dynamic:
 - The “mathematically sublime” is expressed by grandeur, when we encounter something so large that it overwhelms our imagination’s capacity to understand it (a mountain, an ocean, space, etc.)
 - We consider nature as “dynamically sublime” when we consider it as “a power that has no dominion over us” (§28, 260). We have the feeling of the dynamically sublime when we experience nature as fearful while knowing ourselves to be in a position of safety and hence without in fact being afraid. (For example, like watching a storm at sea or a fire from a safe distance.) (From the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)
- It is said that the most common of the emotional “pleasures” among Gothic readers was the sublime—an indescribable feeling that “takes us beyond ourselves.” Think about the sublime, perhaps read more about it online. Then think about what ways you see the sublime expressed in the novel?