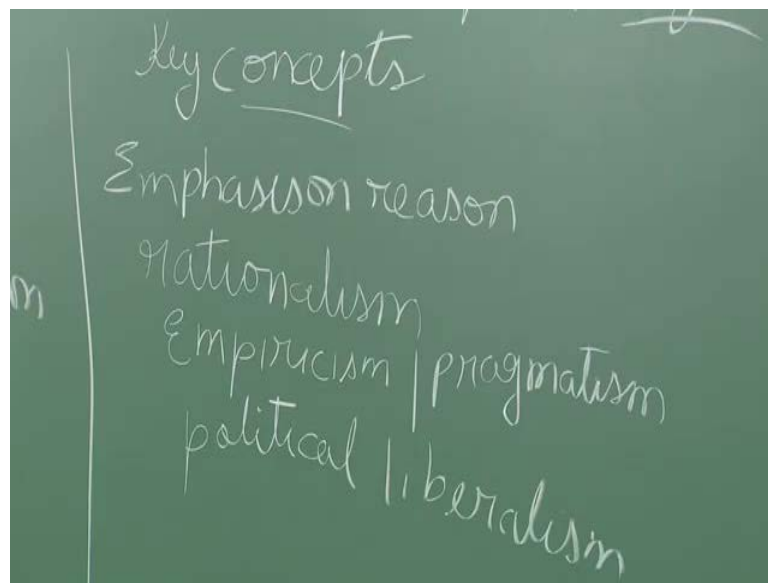


Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture – 11
Early Romanticism
Lec 7 Part A

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Welcome to this lecture on Early Romanticism. Let us talk about the European history between 1760 to 1860, so a 100 year period. What were the chief feature highlights of this period? Two major events- the French revolution and the Industrial revolution. The key ideological features of this age were emphasised on rationality and reason, empiricism and pragmatism. It was also the period where individual efficiency and usefulness was given paramount importance. Political liberalism based on a free economy supported by growth in science and technology also was an integral feature of this period.

Coming to this concept the age of enlightenment, this is the 17th century intellectual and cultural European phenomenon. The main idea was faith in a uniform reason and belief in progress. We have to understand that this is the age which later on went on to influence the romantic period in Britain and America as well. So, this is how it all began.

Now, progress according to the thinkers of this age could be achieved by rejection of traditionalism, obscurantism and authoritarianism. So, these are the two Isms. They revolted against some radical thinkers, especially Hallberg and Diderot. They expressed atheist opinion. So, in the realm of religion, people started questioning the existence of god. There was also anti-clerical attitudes and resistance to the view that the church should have power independent of secular authorities. So, the position of church also started getting interrogated. The exponents of enlightenment believed that reason could be applied to eliminate forces of superstition, inequality, prejudices and barbarism. The age of enlightenment also witnessed the emergence of strong opposition to judicial torture to prosecution for witchcraft, and to rigid prison conditions. It was also the age of great scientific achievements, especially by people such as Isaac Newton and Joseph Priestley. In politics, great efforts were made to enforce the principle of natural liberty, equality, religious tolerance and enforcement of basic human rights.

Enlightenment undermined the traditional notion of mankind having a central and a special place in the overall scheme of things. So, the existence of man itself started getting questioned. Now, what are the key names? Coming to the key names of this period, so in England we had people like William Godwin, Francis Bacon and John Locke; in France we had people like Diderot Voltaire and Rene Descartes, Spinitza in the Netherlands and Leibniz Immanuel Kant, two great thinkers from Germany. Voltaire's fictional tale candied published in 1759 mocks the optimism and determinism of the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz. Voltaire satirises the so-called rational justification of war, the intolerance of religions and the institutions that lead to inequality. So, the idea was that no amount of justification and rationalization could actually justify the existence of barbarism, inequality, superstition and war. Many people use reason and rationality to justify war, to justify social inequality, but Voltaire challenges that.

In political terms, enlightenment philosophers formulated the theory of the ideal state or social contract by citizens of a state Thomas Hobbes, the English thinker expressed a rather bleak and pessimistic philosophy about the state of human condition in his leviathan published in 1651, where he states that there would be continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man solitary poor, nasty, brutish and short. So, that was the pessimistic view of a human condition for Hobbes. John Locke was the most

important philosopher in his formulation of political liberalism. His book *Second Treatise of Civil Government* published in 1690 condemned despotic monarchy and asserted that people had a right to resist tyranny. At the same time in America, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson followed the principles of the European enlightenment which helped them shape the American declaration of independence and the American constitution.

Let us talk about enlightenment and literary criticism. Now, John Locke laid the foundation of British empiricism with his insistence on tolerance, moderation and common sense. Other writers of this period include Joseph Addison, David Hume, Edmund Burke and in the works of these writers, we find the general principles of following reason and adherence to classical values. A key name of this period is Mary Wollstonecraft who lived between 1759 to 1797. She was the daughter of the radical thinker William Godwin and also the wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley. She was one of the first feminist writers of modern times and was a radical thinker herself. Her book *Vindication of the Rights of Men* published in 1790 was a defence of the French revolution. You see there were many people who interrogated the ideals of French revolution, especially the massacre and bloodshed that followed, but Mary Shelley defended the French revolution because in her point of view, it led to something that was of greater good for mankind. She is best known for her *Vindication of the Rights of Women* published in 1792, seminal feminist text. Here she strives to extend to women the enlightenment principle of basing knowledge and morality upon reason. So, reason has to be extended and women's questions and issues should be taken into consideration. That is the premise of *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. She also stresses on women's education and the freedom to think and judge for themselves, rather than anyone else taking decisions for them. So, education for Mary Shelly or Mary Wollstonecraft was the key to freedom for women.

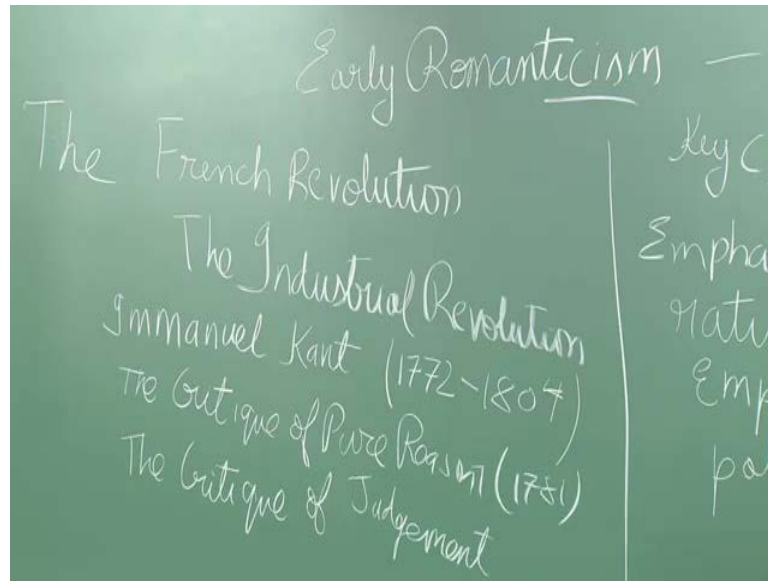
So, like all great intellectual and cultural phenomenon, the enlightenment also has its fair share of criticism. So, critics of the enlightenment accused it of neglecting tradition, emotion and emotional commitments. In the 1940's, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in their *dialectic of enlightenment* were particularly critical of the enlightenment ideals of rationality. So, enlightenment always had its critics, particularly because too much emphasis on reason, practicality and rationality. Everything cannot be

judged on the basis of empiricism and pragmatism. That is the biggest criticism of this movement.

What is enlightenment? Now, this is a question famously posed by Immanuel Kant in 1784. This is also the title of an essay by Immanuel Kant, Kant, the great German philosopher. In the Kantian system, all natural capacities of a creature are destined to evolve completely to their natural end. Kant defines enlightenment as human kind released from its self-incurred immaturity, where he defines immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. Thus, enlightenment for Kant is the process of undertaking to think for oneself, to employ and rely on one's own intellectual capacities in determining what to believe and how to act. Just consider how it all leading towards the concepts of self-reliance and individualism. The title of two key works by Kant's, one is critique of pure reason and the second one is the critique of practical reason, they are the middle point of his great trio of moral writings that include the groundwork of the metaphysics of morals, and the metaphysics of morals.

So, the questions that Kant's critical philosophy poses, the first is central to his theoretical philosophy, and this is the concept of reason as discussed in earlier rationalist thinkers such as Leibniz and Descartes. The second question is central to his practical philosophy which is subservient role accorded to reason by the British empiricist; most importantly Hume who declared reason is only in active and can never be the source of so active principles as conscious or a sense of morals. According to Kant, space and time are subjective because we view the world as special and temporal things in space and time, or the appearances of those things are objective to us. Central to Kant's interest in morality and politics is a belief in human freedom. For Kant, man who is the political and moral agent can exercise freewill, so the concept of freewill and how it started taking its roots in particularly in the European philosophy. In other words, man is not simply a machine on whom ideas can be imposed, but man rather is a free agent who has the liberty to exercise his freewill and who has the freedom to exercise his own freewill.

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Now, Kant's work demonstrates that while he was influenced by the philosophical works of German thinkers, such as Leibniz. He was also receptive to the ideas of the English thinker, such as Locke Hobbes and the French philosopher Rousseau. Though Kant was influenced by Newton's principles of science and physics, he did not dogmatically accept any one fixed metaphysical system as the only possible explanation of the universe. Coming to the critique of pure reason, this is the work that made Kant famous in his country in 1781. So, in this work, Kant attempted to define the boundaries of human reason and knowledge. He queried about what kinds of things can reasoned tell us and what kinds of thing are beyond its grasp. So, limitations of reason, possibilities and limitations of reason, this was the consequence of Locke and Hume's argument that since all our knowledge comes from experience, this knowledge cannot be grounded on any necessary laws. So, necessarily there cannot be laws because experience is important.

So, Kant's philosophy can be characterized as an attempt to answer three fundamental questions. What can I know, what I have to do, what may I hope for. So, his attempt to respond to what can I know, so in critique of pure reason Kant attempts to show that traditional metaphysics rest on a basic mistake, and a mistake is that it assumes that we can make substantive knowledge claims about the world regardless of experience. Now, there is a word that we should know that is a priori. So, Kant calls such claims as synthetic a priori. So, Kant argues that it is impossible to know anything a priori that is

without experience about the world. So, a priori basically means that you do not need to have experience of anything to gain knowledge of it and Kant argues that it is impossible to know anything a priori about the world.

Kant's critique of judgement in 1790 is a treatise in aesthetics. Kant suggests that although aesthetic judgements are based on feeling, their claim to objective validity is not based on these feelings, but upon a priori principles of judgement that are preconditions for such feelings. Central to Kant's view of aesthetic judgement is the concept of purposiveness. This refers to the fact that we must assume a certain coherence and connection among the appearances of the external world on ages, so that we can reflect coherently upon it. For Kant, we presuppose a harmony between nature and our cognitive powers as if they are suited to each other. Kant calls this perceived harmony purposiveness which gives us pleasure.

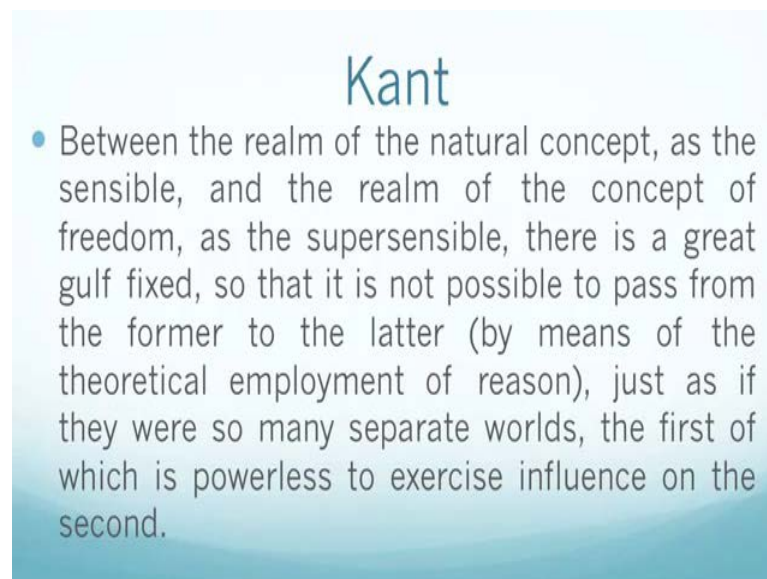
For Kant when we make an aesthetic judgement, we make a judgement about the form of an object and not its content. The objects form gives rise to pleasure because it exhibits a harmony with our cognitive powers that is our understanding and imagination. We call the object beautiful and our ability to judge the object by such a pleasure is called taste. Thus, an aesthetic judgement is not a judgement of cognition. It does not refer to the object and gives no knowledge of it. So, this is how we get Kant's notion of imagination and aesthetic judgement, where Kant reads aesthetic judgement as an ability to judge an object in reference to the free lawfulness.

Kant's explanation of the role of imagination in an aesthetic judgment laid to the foundation for romantic theory and criticism because for Kant, the function of imagination is not reproductive as it is our ordinary cognition of the world. In our regular interaction with the world our imagination is constrained by the actual objects with which we are confronted, but when we approach the world from an aesthetic perspective, our imagination is not required to undergo the same constraints. Now, understanding serves imagination and our imagination can become productive and spontaneous. So, that is how we get the idea of free lawfulness of the imagination. It is a lawfulness and adherence to the basic laws of understanding which is not imposed on the imagination, but self-exercised even in its free play. This gives us the understanding of Kant's idea of subjective harmony of imagination and discusses the notion of purposiveness without

one key concept in Kant is purposiveness. Another key term is the sublime which occurs in his critique of a judgment.

So, Kant explains that the beautiful and the sublime are similar because they are both concerned with pleasure rather than knowledge. Still there are significant differences. Beauty concerns the form of an object which consists of definite boundaries. There are limitations; there are preconceived notions, the sublime concerns and formless objects which represent boundlessness. Now, beauty is accompanied by a feeling of charm. The sublime caters to our negative pleasure that is it evokes admiration and respect rather than just evoking a feeling of being charmed by a beautiful object. So, when it comes to sublime our feelings of admiration and respect are more important. These differences between the beautiful and the sublime are based on the connection between understanding and reason.

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Between the realm of the natural concept as the sensible and the realm of the concept of freedom as the super sensible, there is a great gulf fixed, so that it is not possible to pass from the former to the latter by means of the theoretical employment of reason, just as if they were so many separate worlds, the first of which is powerless to exercise influence on the second. So, now, what is the legacy of Kant? We have seen his two seminal works, the critique of pure reason the critique of judgment published in 1790. So, what is his legacy? Kant's philosophy had a far reaching influence on the romantics. His

concepts of aesthetic freedom, artistic form, genius and non-utilitarian character of art exerted a big impact on the Goethe and Schlegel along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Poe, Edgar Allan Poe. Again Kant's ideal of aesthetic disinterestedness was applied by writers, such as Matthew Arnold and new critics and went on to influence the new critics as well as postmodernists like John Francois Leotard.