

Lutzel on Löwy and Sayre, trans. Porter (2001)

Löwy, Michael and Robert Sayre. *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Durham: Duke UP, 2001. Pp. 328. ISBN 0-8223-2794-5

Justine Lutzel, Bowling Green State University

Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre's *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* provides a dense and comprehensive elucidation of the evolution of Romanticism as we have come to know it today. The text is comprised of six chapters that span great lengths of chronology and geography (throughout centuries, continents, disciplines, and movements). Although remarkably cogent for its scope, the vastness of the book is often overwhelming. Throughout the book, the authors introduce a wealth of disparate typologies (from reactionary to revolutionary) and distinct characters (from Lukács to Coleridge) derived from their definitions of both Romanticism and modernity. Löwy and Sayre extract Romanticism from its exclusive confines of the literary; rather, they define Romanticism as a "worldview," a reaction to modern capitalism and its discontents. Ultimately, *Romanticism* engages with themes such as humanity and community to argue convincingly that Romanticism does indeed still exist today.

In their first chapter, "Redefining Romanticism," Löwy and Sayre provide a historiography of Romanticism while introducing working definitions of their two heavily loaded title terms. While Romanticism constitutes a "collective mental structure," modernity is "engendered by the Industrial Revolution and in which the market economy prevails" (18). Romanticism mourns the loss of an "ideal past" and finds in modernity the "alienation of human relationships" and a "failure of communication" (42). There are clear echoes to Marxist thought and the book often wrestles between the different portraits of a society altered by a Marxist revolution and a society premised on the organic values idealized by Romantics.

Perhaps the most productive typology that *Romanticism* introduces is Utopian Romanticism. For Löwy and Sayre, Romanticism is not a movement that may be relegated to the past; although it seeks to harness a past moment (epitomized, for the authors, by the Middle Ages), it also imagines a not-yet-realized future that would exalt the qualitative over the quantitative and the imagination over standardization. Because Romanticism is always a critique of modernity, this Romanticist vision of utopia must either do away with or compromise certain modern conveniences to which we have become accustomed. Illustrating this point in a fascinating investigation of Romanticism and its relationship to the "Green" movement, Löwy and Sayre demonstrate how machines currently utilized for the sole benefit of the modern capitalist market might be subjected "to a different kind of social logic" where these machines might be used to discover solutions for the climate change crisis (254).

The breadth and value of *Romanticism* cannot be fully explicated in such a short review. As an intellectual history, the book is certainly of use to students, while the provocative claims made on behalf of Romanticism make the book necessary reading for contemporary scholars working in the field. Löwy and Sayre convincingly demonstrate the place that Romanticism holds today both within and outside the academy – and the implications of this argument are far-reaching. From Goethe and Schiller to Mann and Bloch to feminism and environmentalism, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* shows us all how to be Romantic – and how embodying that worldview can indeed change the world.

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