

## The Need for Romantic Art

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For conceptual, volitional, spiritual beings, art is an essential need. Art forms include literature, music, motion pictures, painting, sculpture, dance, and even aspects or moments of (some)one's own life. In the dominant culture of fatalism, of unreason, altruist self-sacrifice, and consensual tyranny, art – romantic art – is an especially greater need for rational individualists.

Romantic art is a selectively recreated and stylized reality, through which one could contemplate and experience the beauty and benevolence of life's heroic values – the values of truth and goodness, justice and courage, achievement and joy – the values of reason that enlighten and inspire, that provide the spiritual fuel for nourishing one's soul to aspire for one's moral ideals.

Romantic art projects and celebrates the nobility and grandeur of choosing to live one's life as a rational being.

To elaborate on this are the following excerpts from the book, *The Romantic Manifesto*, by Ayn Rand.

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Romanticism is a category of art based on the recognition of the principle that man possesses the faculty of volition.

Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments. An artist recreates those aspects of reality which represent his fundamental view of man and of existence. In forming a view of man's nature, a fundamental question one must answer is whether man possesses the faculty of volition—because one's conclusions and evaluations in regard to all the characteristics, requirements and actions of man depend on the answer.

["What is Romanticism?"]

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Is the universe intelligible to man, or unintelligible and unknowable? Can man find happiness on earth, or is he doomed to frustration and despair? Does man have the power of choice, the power to choose his goals and to achieve them, the power to direct the course of his life—or is he the helpless plaything of forces beyond his control, which determine his fate? Is man, by nature, to be valued as good, or to be despised as evil? These are metaphysical questions, but the answers to them determine the kind of ethics men will accept and practice; the answers are the link between metaphysics and ethics. And although metaphysics as such is not a normative science, the answers to this category of questions

assume, in man's mind, the function of metaphysical value-judgments, since they form the foundation of all of his moral values.

Consciously or subconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, man knows that he needs a comprehensive view of existence to integrate his values, to choose his goals, to plan his future, to maintain the unity and coherence of his life—and that his metaphysical value-judgments are involved in every moment of his life, in his every choice, decision and action.

Metaphysics—the science that deals with the fundamental nature of reality—involves man's widest abstractions. It includes every concrete he has ever perceived, it involves such a vast sum of knowledge and such a long chain of concepts that no man could hold it all in the focus of his immediate conscious awareness. Yet he needs that sum and that awareness to guide him—he needs the power to summon them into full, conscious focus.

That power is given to him by art.

["The Psycho-Epistemology of Art"]

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A sense of life is a pre-conceptual equivalent of metaphysics, an emotional, subconsciously integrated appraisal of man and of existence. It sets the nature of a man's emotional responses and the essence of his character.

Long before he is old enough to grasp such a concept as metaphysics, man makes choices, forms value-judgments, experiences emotions and acquires a certain implicit view of life. Every choice and value-judgment implies some estimate of himself and of the world around him—most particularly, of his capacity to deal with the world. He may draw conscious conclusions, which may be true or false; or he may remain mentally passive and merely react to events (i.e., merely feel). Whatever the case may be, his subconscious mechanism sums up his psychological activities, integrating his conclusions, reactions or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes his automatic response to the world around him. What began as a series of single, discrete conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit metaphysics with the compelling motivational power of a constant, basic emotion—an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences. This is a sense of life.

["Philosophy and Sense of Life"]

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Art is a selective re-creation of reality according to an artist's metaphysical value-judgments. Man's profound need of art lies in the fact that his cognitive faculty is conceptual, i.e., that he acquires knowledge by means of abstractions, and needs the power to bring his widest metaphysical abstractions into his immediate, perceptual awareness. Art fulfills this need: by means of a selective re-creation, it concretizes man's fundamental view of himself and of existence. It tells man, in effect, which aspects of

his experience are to be regarded as essential, significant, important. In this sense, art teaches man how to use his consciousness. It conditions or stylizes man's consciousness by conveying to him a certain way of looking at existence.

[Art and Cognition,"]

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Since man lives by reshaping his physical background to serve his purpose, since he must first define and then create his values—a rational man needs a concretized projection of these values, an image in whose likeness he will re-shape the world and himself. Art gives him that image; it gives him the experience of seeing the full, immediate, concrete reality of his distant goals.

Since a rational man's ambition is unlimited, since his pursuit and achievement of values is a lifelong process—and the higher the values, the harder the struggle—he needs a moment, an hour or some period of time in which he can experience the sense of his completed task, the sense of living in a universe where his values have been successfully achieved. It is like a moment of rest, a moment to gain fuel to move farther. Art gives him that fuel; the pleasure of contemplating the objectified reality of one's own sense of life is the pleasure of feeling what it would be like to live in one's ideal world.

["Art and Sense of Life,"]

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The importance of that experience is not in *what* he learns from it, but in *that* he experiences it. The fuel is not a theoretical principle, not a didactic "message," but the life-giving fact of experiencing a moment of metaphysical joy—a moment of love for existence.

["The Goal of My Writing"]

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Romantic art is the fuel and the spark plug of a man's soul; its task is to set a soul on fire and never let it go out.

["Art and Moral Treason," ]

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The archenemy and destroyer of Romanticism was the altruist morality.

Since Romanticism's essential characteristic is the projection of values, particularly moral values, altruism introduced an insolvable conflict into Romantic literature from the start. The altruist morality cannot be practiced (except in the form of self-destruction) and, therefore, cannot be projected or dramatized convincingly in terms of man's life on earth (particularly in the realm of psychological motivation). With altruism as the criterion of value and virtue, it is impossible to create an image of man

at his best—“as he might be and ought to be.” The major flaw that runs through the history of Romantic literature is the failure to present a convincing hero, i.e., a convincing image of a virtuous man.

[“What Is Romanticism?”]

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It is a significant commentary on the present state of our culture that I have become the object of hatred, smears, denunciations, because I am famous as virtually the only novelist who has declared that her soul is not a sewer, and neither are the souls of her characters, and neither is the soul of man.

The motive and purpose of my writing can best be summed up by saying that if a dedication page were to precede the total of my work, it would read: To the glory of Man.

And if anyone should ask me what it is that I have said to the glory of Man, I will answer only by paraphrasing Howard Roark. I will hold up a copy of Atlas Shrugged and say: "The explanation rests".

[“The Goal of My Writing”]

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