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*The
Romantic Virtuoso*

Morse Peckham

with an introduction by Leo Daugherty



THE
ROMANTIC
VIRTUOSO



Morse Beckham



Wesleyan University Press

Published by University Press of New England

Hanover and London



Introduction

LEO DAUGHERTY



Morse Peckham was both a great skeptic and a dazzlingly original social and literary theorist. After first getting interested in nineteenth-century culture, he became obsessed with Romanticism. Where had it come from? How had it happened? What, in the end, had happened to it? And most important of all: what *was* it? Peckham's skepticism extended to all previous answers to those questions, especially the last, and it was not driven solely by his frustration at those answers' historical and explanatory inadequacies. It was also driven by his puzzlement over why such answers didn't account for what had come, to him, to seem so obvious about Romanticism: that it was easily the most significant, as well as the most bafflingly anomalous, phenomenon in Western culture for which we possess an adequate historical record from beginning to end. So part of his life's work—the part which this, his last book, brings to a close—was devoted to figuring all this out.

As Peckham worked on Romanticism over the years, he gently (but, for those who disagreed with his findings, maddeningly) put most of the previous theory and history of it to shame—and, for many of us who read him carefully and thought about him deeply, to rest. But he also developed his own new and powerful theories and historical explanations, breathtaking in their erudition and brilliance, to account for various pieces of the puzzle of Romanticism—and, ultimately, for the thing itself. For most people, that would be quite enough for one life of the mind. But for any account of Morse Peckham's work and its significance, it is only one piece of the story.

Citations in the Introduction are to editions listed in section VIII of the Bibliography.

The reason lies in those two words *erudition* and *brilliance*. Peckham self-deprecatingly joked about his "dilettantism"; but dilettantes are people who know a little about a lot of things, whereas he knew more about a lot of things than many specialists know about those same things. In fact, he was a person so deeply erudite, and so brilliant in his ability to think originally about what he knew, that talks with him struck a good many people, knowledgeable in their own right, as being like dreams, science fiction (as in "close encounters"), or marginally supernatural experiences. But they were nothing of the sort. Those talks were with a person who had worked hard for years to learn what he knew and what he thought about it. (He was forty-eight, for example, when he felt he knew enough to publish his first real book.) The bright flash of his thought—especially when it came in a moment of typically lucid out-loud musing about a new problem one had brought him—was a shock one but gradually got used to. And it was this erudition and brilliance, when applied to the enigma of Romanticism, that many years later led Peckham (or, as he felt, *threw* him) into the outlandish step of creating his own original theory of human behavior.

For Peckham felt that one could not understand Romanticism in isolation. It was not enough to know, for example, "where it came from." One needed to know *why* it came as it *did*—since, for him, it was *sui generis* as a piece of culture history. It was literally unlike any other cultural response to previous events and states of affairs, and unlike any other cultural innovation—in general structure, in the extremity of its innovations, and in the protean forms it took. He agreed with others that there were arguably "several Romanticisms," but he also felt that there was a central core of *most deeply innovative* Romanticism, to which its variants stood as weaker relations. He could not at first explain to himself how such an unprecedented innovation could have occurred. But he gradually became convinced that the right question to ask was, "what were those few central and seminal people at the forward edge of the cultural response we call Romanticism *doing*?" He decided that the only chance for an adequate answer lay in pursuing Romanticism across all the cultures in which it emerged—and in doing this in terms of its foundational documents and artifacts, as well as across all the arts and other cultural genres (for example, the disciplines of anthropology and psychology) in which it emerged. And this, unbelievably, he actually did.

But he still remained unsatisfied, feeling that he had not yet touched anything very near bottom. His reasoning over the years went something as follows. In order to understand a particular work of literature (as representative of, say, a "movement" as problematic as

Romanticism), one needed a good critical and historical theory of literature in general. But the theoretical paradigms that were part of his own “received culture” as a young literary critic were woefully inadequate, partly because they were crypto-religious, partly because they were provincial, partly because they were frighteningly anti-intellectual, but *mainly* because they were not solidly based on a good critical and historical theory of aesthetics in general. Looking around, Peckham found no such good theory, so he worked hard to create one of his own. But it didn’t take him too long to see that since works of art (no matter how defined) are made of signs and perceived as signs, a good theory of aesthetics would really require a good theory of (at the very least) verbal and visual semiotics.

After first trying to base such a semiotic theory on the work of Charles Morris, he threw up his hands and once more decided to make his own. But, since verbal and visual signs are made by people, one would need a good general theory of human behavior (in order to go back and explain, in any really adequate way, such a behavioral innovation as Romanticism), and once more he looked high and low and could find none good enough. (“My objection to academic behaviorism,” he said in both seriousness and jest, “is that it is not nearly behaviorist enough” [*Romanticism and Behavior* vi].) And so he again created his own. But (going still further in search of something to premise things on), he created it out of his longstanding bedrock conviction that any reliable theory of human behavior would have to be based in turn on a reliable theory of human evolution, itself solidly based on the theory of general evolution.¹

And so it was that Peckham, cheerfully (as always) working his way up the subsumption ladder, terminated his own “explanatory regress” (a late rhetorical term of his own coinage) by ultimately explaining the Romantics in terms of his own early (but unwavering) interest in Charles Darwin. He had done the standard variorum of the *Origin*, and his often-reprinted essay “Darwin and Darwinisticism” remains a minor classic in the history of science.² (The conclusion is inescapable, according to Peckham’s theory, that Darwin turned out to be one of the central and most significant of all the nineteenth-century Romantics.) In any event, the byproducts of Peckham’s work on Romanticism over the years—especially his theory of human behavior, which he finally managed to articulate in his most difficult book, the luminous *Explanation and Power: The Control of Human Behavior*—were every bit as important as the work itself, arguably even more so, and Peckham knew it.³

After all, if your obsessions had led you to have and to hold two pivotal and generative intellectual interests during your long working

life, and if those interests happened to be Romanticism and human behavior (and even if you thought the two inextricably linked, as Peckham did), you would most likely conclude that your work on the larger subject of behavior was probably more important than the smaller subject that in special and fascinating ways exemplified it. Still, though, you might find that Romanticism wouldn't go away, simply because it struck you as the *most interesting* single behavioral response a small group of people (followed in various ways by millions of others) ever made. You might, then, like Peckham, end up in staying with both. And you might also eventually find yourself at seventy, as he did, with no academic field of your own at all. But you might not feel as good about it as he did on most days; the occasional grumble about *anomie* and all that aside, he loved it. After all, he *approved of anomie*.

Peckham's theory of Romanticism grew and changed through the years, along with all the rest of his social, literary, and language theory. "I used to think . . . , but now I think . . ." is a figure so frequent in Peckham's conversation that his friends sometimes needle him about its occurrences," writes one former student (Matalene xix). But a good basic primer of that theory, which could also serve as the history of its development, could be made up of only eight lucid essays that take it from the beginning to the end: "Toward a Theory of Romanticism" (1950); "Toward a Theory of Romanticism: II. Reconsiderations" (1960); "The Dilemma of a Century: The Four Stages of Romanticism" (1964); "Romanticism: The Present State of Theory" (1965); "Romanticism and Behavior" (1974); "Literature and Behavior" (1980); "Cultural Transcendence: The Task of the Romantics" (1981); and the Introduction to *Romanticism and Ideology* (1985).⁴ And all of these are included in Peckham's three collections of essays (*The Triumph of Romanticism*, *Romanticism and Behavior*, and *Romanticism and Ideology*). The late novelist and historian Rudolph von Abele once said roughly this to me: "My God, on top of the fact that Peckham's always talking about Darwin and behaviorism and Wagner and Nietzsche and Caspar David Friedrich in his stuff on Romanticism, he's constantly *building the theory*. And he's always warning that any and all of his conclusions are only tentative, only provisional, only 'probes.' Everybody I know *wants* to be able to follow it, but they say they just don't know enough and just can't keep up and just can't grasp it."

But it's actually much easier to follow Peckham through the years than one might think. One reason is that he always tells you, in so many words, "I used to think . . . , but now I think . . ." A second

reason is that, like many other notable intellectual and artistic figures, he did his very best work toward the end—thus making it fairly simple to see what he “really thought” about Romanticism (or anything else he’d developed during his lifetime) by looking at what he said about it in the late seventies and then throughout the eighties. A third reason is that he pushed his thinking so far that it eventually generated conclusions he could at last feel reasonably happy to *stand by*—conclusions stemming from both his theoretical and historical work—some of which he got to only with the present book.⁵

The center of Peckham’s theory of Romanticism (from which one can work backward and outward as far as one likes or needs) is this. A few very innovative people in Western culture discovered, and then established within that culture, what Peckham calls “the basic behavior pattern of culture transcendence” (*Romanticism and Ideology* 8). This discovery was the result of those people’s judgment that “explanatory collapse—the failure of powerful implicit and explicit language-based ideologies—had occurred. (Peckham’s definition of “ideology” is “regnant platitude” [22].) In these people’s case, what had collapsed on them was precisely the foundational language of that explanatory house of cards, the Enlightenment. Peckham believed that such explanatory collapses actually happen all the time; but, for him, the uniqueness of Romanticism was caused by the immensity of the crash and the resultant immensity of its effects upon these few people, taken together with the unparalleled innovativeness of their individual and collective cultural responses—some stylistic, some substantive.

In addition to the collapse of Enlightenment explanations, the Romantics’ “basic behavior pattern of cultural transcendence” was also caused by their resultant “alienation from the culture and the society’s institutions” (8). It came to be characterized by, and soon thereafter strategized through, several other factors: (a) “cultural vandalism”; (b) “social withdrawal”; (c) “reducing the [individual’s social] interaction rate to the minimum”; (d) “randomizing behavior”; (e) “selecting a promising emergent innovation”; (f) “collecting a little group of supporters”; (g) “propagandizing the [resultant] cultural emergent or innovation or ‘creativity.’”⁶ But by far the most important consequence of the Romantic’s cultural transcendence (and innovative Romanticism’s most defining characteristic as well) was that the person underwent “a deconversion from hypostatized redemptionism . . . [which in turn] led to a conversion into a *permanent deconversion*” (italics mine) (8).

This state of permanent deconversion led the Romantic to feel free

enough for (or to be driven to) "the acceptance of an irresolvable tension between subject and object, between mind and nature, between theory and empirical data, between language and the world"—and this acceptance Peckham believes to be "the heart of the Romantic position" (40). But the position includes a related claim that is crucial to understanding where Peckham was coming from and where he was going: that this same acceptance is "identical with the heuristic conception of scientific explanation, or theory," because in fact "the epistemology of Romanticism is congruent with the epistemology of the more sophisticated philosophies of science" (40). For Peckham, it was obvious that the people who managed this acceptance best were those who proved best able to transcend their cultures and those cultures' various (but always present in some form or another) power-serving ideologies—and, in particular, those ideologies that were redemptively unity based and (hence) stasis based.

In a nutshell, then, the innovative Romantic was a person who responded to the collapse of the Enlightenment by deciding, or somehow coming to feel, that not only the explanatory cultures of the past must be dismissed and transcended, but also the explanatory cultures of the present. Such a person therefore stopped moving from one ideological conversion to another (especially religious conversion) and simply came to rest (although it could never be a comfortable rest) in the "permanent conversion to deconversion." And the reason the most interesting Romantics did that, Peckham felt, lay in their discovery that (in his words, although not in their own) "all language is fictive and normative."⁷ In partial consequence, these same people were enabled (whether in joy or resigned melancholy) to "accept the tensions." Thus, the stage was set: such people, having so concluded (whether consciously or not), were ready to do serious innovation—and indeed, if they were going to do anything, could do nothing else.

In holding that language is "normative," Peckham means simply that instances of it are always attempts—whether masked or not—to get the hearer or reader to do as the utterer wishes. In holding that language is "fictive," he means only that it is what other theorists past and present might call "purely imaginative"—liberated from all actual real-world referents. (The claim that language is "fictive" is not far from anticipating, and is fairly close to, slightly later "nonreferential" claims about language by such philosophers as Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty.⁸)

Thus, since they are made up solely of normative language, all ideologies are attempts to control human beings by verbal power—or, that failing, by force. And Peckham's pivotal argument about the Ro-

manatics concludes that the most interesting ones were simply the first people to understand this, to transcend the cultural attempt to do it (and, thereby, to transcend the cultures making the attempt), to "just say no" to it—and to all the "its." Peckham's Romantic "permanent conversion to deconversion" thus means just what its words say: a person "decides"—because of finding out that the language of the "received" ideology is merely fictive and normative (but especially, when it comes to ideology, normative)—to become permanently separated from any ideologies he or she might hold, and to become permanently committed to never again becoming converted to any.

Does this mean that Peckham was, in the postmodern and post-structuralist sense, "antifoundational"? Yes and no. In most ways, yes. But Peckham hoped for a different kind of intellectual future than the one we now have (though I think we will yet get something like his). In Peckham's version of the future, the best scientific work should play a central role—particularly theoretical work—and should be central to the social and intellectual lives of all people everywhere. Because "appropriate" response to ideological control "can ultimately be maintained only by the application of force in the form of economic deprivation, imprisonment, torture, and execution," he saw the main hope for the future resting with "the capacity of science to exploit ideological instability" (6).⁹ His skepticism thus did not extend all the way to the best work done by the best scientific workers, although he certainly thought such workers should know more about the history and theory of their work (including their own invested social roles). He also thought they should know more about the serious problems caused for their work by its unavoidably rhetorical nature, by the fact that it is in large part just more "discourse" in service to ideologies, themselves in service to stasis-based power. He thought the only way out lay in a science of the future which would carry forward the work of the Romantics in "undermining the ideological superstructure of Western culture, and of culture itself." In fact, Peckham saw this as "an undermining which, it may be, is the only human hope" (24).

He pinned this hope on the science of the future turning out, literally, to be (in his sense) "Romantic" science. The scientific workers of the future, if permanently converted to deconversionism, would have a chance of being free from the controls laid down by ideological explanations, or for any (psychological) need for them in the future; hence, they might turn out to be accepting of, and maybe even committed to, the same "irresolvable tensions" necessary for true Romanticism—and for true innovation. The result would not be that

such people could, in their work, achieve “disinterestedness” and “objectivity”—for achieving them, or even coming close, is obviously impossible for humans (a fact which has too long served the neoludites too well as a red herring). Rather, such people would merely *want* them enough, and *try* for them enough, to innovate their way freely toward them, thus helping to bring about the destabilization of stasis-based cultural power and the “regnant platitudes” that ever explain and justify its continuance.

It is important to recognize that Peckham’s ideas on Romanticism and science are flatly opposed to the ideas of such theorists as Rorty (in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*) and Donna Haraway (in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*), who respectively argue that science can provide no such foundation, or, even if it could, that its workers should not want to try for objectivity and disinterestedness. Rorty believes the former, arguing that Kuhnian “scientific revolutions” are merely “metaphoric redcriptions,” and thus that “we must resist the temptation to think that the redcriptions of reality offered by contemporary physical or biological science are somehow closer to ‘the things themselves,’ less ‘mind-dependent,’ than the redcriptions . . . offered by contemporary culture criticism” (Rorty 16). With “foundations” cleared out of the way, Rorty has freed himself up to advocate the kind of communitarian authority he wants (since authority of some kind is obviously needed, and since there is, on his account, no other kind possible than those which communities make up). Haraway, meanwhile, believes the latter, and in consequence makes a passionate argument for a future that is the direct opposite of Peckham’s. She believes the real hope lies in replacing scientific objectivity and disinterestedness and (ideological) “innocence” with subjectivity, interestedness, and “guilt,” because she believes that science should be brought into the service of the (ideological, then social) agenda she wants (Haraway 72–124). She thus seems to hope for something Peckham truly dreaded: a cultural future governed largely by an ideology-driven scientific foundation in service to well-intentioned, high-minded, and otherwise idealistic politics. (I can hear him now, ticking off the historical precedents, starting of course with science under Hitler.)

The underlying question, assuming that one wants a future liberated from ideology-justified power establishments, is simply, Where do you place your strategic bets? Most other contemporary social theorists place them on either the denial of scientific (or any) foundations or the advocacy of competing ideological foundations for science and its methods (for example, that it must serve “justice,” or

“the community,” or “the earth-goddess Gaia”)—and that the scientific endeavor should otherwise be opposed. But Peckham’s bet is that the destabilization of ideology-based power structures can only be achieved through demonstrating, with a “Romantic” science we don’t even have yet (and which by its very nature can never be fully realized), that the self-interested, justificatory explanations of power structures are falsely premised, poorly argued, and erroneously concluded because they don’t match the best data.

Which data can be explained in better ways.

Which explanations, if good enough, will redound to the ultimate betterment of people and their world.

The best and most promising example from the past and present: Darwin’s theory and its revisions by those neo-Darwinists most faithful to its methods and spirit.

Yet if one sets the disagreement about science aside, what remains is mostly agreement between Peckham and the postmodernist/post-structuralist theorists as to what to be skeptical about (that is, virtually everything, including most of science as currently practiced), and why. Part of the reason is their shared love of, and reliance upon, Nietzsche—who was certainly one of the two or three major influences on Peckham. This consonance can appear odd on the surface, however, because Peckham also traced his intellectual lineage back through George Herbert Mead, John Dewey, and William James to C. S. Pierce, saying explicitly that he was working in the tradition of American Pragmatism (he refined Mead’s theory of meaning but stayed pretty much with it, while eventually rejecting Pierce’s theory of signs). And it is hard to think of many postmodernists and post-structuralists who have much affinity for, or even interest in, Pragmatism—until one thinks of Rorty, who is a neopragmatist (although one who, like Peckham, traces back to what Rorty calls “Nietzschean Pragmatism”), and whose ideas about language (for example, its “nonreferentiality” and “contingency”) are close to their own and to Peckham’s. Yet they are suspicious of Rorty (in a way that those who know about Peckham are not), and rightly so.

The reason lies in the disagreement between Rorty and Peckham (and themselves) about the goodness of innovation and its role in the undermining of regnant communitarian ideologies—a disagreement that goes back to the fact that Rorty dislikes those aspects of Nietzsche which Peckham (and the postmodernists/poststructuralists) love, and vice versa. In particular, Rorty’s (uncharacteristically) cobwebby talk about the distinction between public and private behavior makes it clear that he has little use for the Nietzsche who publicly advocated

the sort of public innovation which might undermine liberally established communitarian consensus. For Peckham, however, it is precisely *that* deathly cultural reality—as experienced in the real, power-based-relations world lived in by real people—that needs to be forever transcended, forever opposed. And in thinking so, he is joined by some of the more prominent poststructuralists.

Two such theorists are Gilles Deleuze and Jacques Derrida. Peckham's theory of what the Romantics were up to is in fact very near Deleuze's idea that "language is not made to be believed but to be obeyed" and with his long corollary obsession with the (then) obvious question: How do you get something new? (Deleuze 22). In the case of Derrida, the resemblances are, if anything, even more obvious because his and Peckham's respective theories, albeit couched in different rhetorics, are nearly identical. When he talks about "deconstructing," he means the destabilizing of ideological foundations—and, equally as important, the building-back-up of new (but, as with Peckham, always provisional) foundations. If Peckham is a "foundationist," then, he is one in Derridaean terms: his foundation is his belief in, and commitment to, the continual reaffirmation of deconstruction/innovation. He differs from Deleuze and Derrida only in his claim that scientific research at its best—"Romantic science"—doesn't merely contribute to that work, but does in fact constitute the major hope for its successful continuance.

Peckham's theory of Romanticism (and of its cultural usefulness in the past, present, and future) is also consonant with the underlying positions of several other formidable figures in contemporary arts and letters. A short (if initially surprising) list would include Jean Baudrillard, William S. Burroughs, and Noam Chomsky. What these figures share is a passionate social and intellectual libertarianism (which is the direct opposite of the rather naive communitarianism of such theorists as Rorty and Haraway). This core position leads them, by means of their various rhetorics, to posit, and then to participate in, something of a Manichean high drama in which a "sons of light" power of infinitely various, innovative, and (hence) culturally destabilizing "speech" (interpreted broadly) is pitted against an oppressive "sons of darkness" cultural power establishment (endlessly imperialistic and hegemonizing, albeit inherently unstable because of its inner contradictions), itself armored in ideological explanations/justifications of stasis and unity ultimately backed up by force. (All four, in their various gentle and even pacifistic ways, counsel war.) Moreover, this same libertarian (and hence dualistic) drama is also what connects up, *internally*, Peckham's own theories of Romanticism, aes-

thetics, language, and human behavior itself. Much less obviously, however, it provides the same internal linkage for Chomsky's theories of syntax and politics; for Baudrillard's social theory, media, and travel writing; and for the whole of Burroughs' narrative work from the late 1950s through the present.¹⁰

Granted that the attempt to make "histories of ideas" is still thought worth doing, I would argue for the usefulness of considering Peckham's theory of Romanticism within the context of both the deconstructionist work of Derrida and Deleuze and the libertarian/dualist "Romantic Manicheism" of Baudrillard, Burroughs, and Chomsky. These figures premise virtually everything on the (relative) goodness of continuous, culturally destabilizing innovation, and they committedly advocate the social "right" to such innovation. Although their connectedness has not been obvious, they have nonetheless separately worked the same shared territory at the same time, for the same underlying reasons and in the same passionate hopes. As we come to the end of the century, it seems appropriate to try to see those deep affiliations between our major figures which will likely seem obvious after the small stuff fades away and the broader outlines emerge.

What remains to be discussed here is Peckham's historical work on Romanticism and the circumstances of its publication. From the beginning, his ideas on the subject had drawn fire—sometimes from the most eminent scholars and critics of their day—because he did not, they said, provide sufficient examples. "Who *are* these 'central' cultural transmitters and innovators Peckham is always talking about?" they asked. Since he was usually being quite clear about who they were (albeit arguably in piecemeal fashion resulting from scattered publication, some of it in ephemeral journals), and since his arguments about Romanticism were usually models of lucidity (at least for people knowing the history and willing to take on the complexity and subtlety of his thought), this question amounted to something of a rationalization for disliking (and in some cases despising) the ideas and arguments themselves.

I think it fair to say that Peckham was a bit troubled and irritated by the complaint. After all, he had early on done an anthology of what he considered the seminal Romantic texts, *Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century*, which, although greatly neglected, remains the best such anthology ever published in English. But at the same time he was aware that a thoroughgoing history of Romanticism was in fact badly needed—one that would take it from its beginnings in the

late eighteenth century up to its end (in Peckham's nearly solitary recognition) in about 1912. Such a history would trace Romanticism's development across the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. It would especially stress the point that Romanticism's high-water mark was Nietzsche, of whom Peckham wrote as early as 1965: "The whole Romantic tradition moves irresistibly towards Nietzsche. . . . And it is Nietzsche who was the great liberator and releaser for almost every creator of modern art and culture" (325). Such a history would also foreground significant relationships and patterns as they moved through time, especially those not generally recognized. And . . . it would at last name all the names.

And so it came to pass that, at some point in the early 1980s, when he was around seventy and at the very top of his game, Morse Peckham signed a contract with a small publisher to write a multivolume history of Romanticism titled *Romanticism and its Consequences: Emergent Culture in the Nineteenth Century, 1790-1912*. The first volume, *The Birth of Romanticism: 1790-1815*, appeared in 1986. Arguably the most distinguished cultural history of Romanticism ever written, it went generally unreviewed, undistributed, and unread, although a few key ads did appear (most notably some full-page ones in *PMLA*). Peckham appeared oblivious, and indeed he probably was; always something of the reverse snob, and unusually enamored (for the fiercely careerist 1980s) with the antiprofessional pleasures of casual (and even desultory-seeming) publication, he struck me as taking a certain delight in the disparity between the book's excellence and its (lack of) reception. He simply sat down and started writing the second volume in the series, which bore the working title *The Romantic Virtuoso, 1815-1825*.

* * *

At some point in the summer of 1990, I found in my mailbox a big package from Peckham. It contained a typescript of the book, in two major sections, retitled *The Romantic Virtuoso, 1815-1825, and Meditations on the Consequences of Romanticism*. A covering note said that he had tired of the entire project and was sending me the one book he had made out of all that remained to be done. He implied that he was not at that time interested in publishing it—he had evidently decided to write and publish no more—but was sending it along because he knew I was interested in its progress (which he had kept me up on in his letters of the late 1980s¹¹), and because he thought I might enjoy it. Which I did.

A few months later, Peckham suffered the first of a series of debilitating strokes, and for nearly three years afterward the typescript of his last book sat on my shelf. I did not quite know what, if anything, to do about it. Finally, in the early summer of 1993, I decided that it was too valuable a book (in general terms, but also because of its status as Peckham's last word on Romanticism at the end of some forty-five years) to go unpublished. I also felt responsible for doing something about it through learning that the typescript in my possession had turned out, apparently, to be the sole surviving copy (although others had read the book, at least in draft). I consulted with two of Peckham's oldest and dearest friends—Bill Matalene (who came to write the Biographical Afterword for the book) and David L. Powell (to whom Peckham dedicates it)—and they encouraged me to pursue publication. So, sometime in the middle of the summer I offered it to Wesleyan University Press, whose editors and readers were enthusiastically receptive. In September, Morse Peckham died in his eightieth year.

Manuscript corrections in the author's hand indicate that he had originally meant to do a few more pages on the first section (that is, *The Romantic Virtuoso* proper) but had decided they would be unnecessary to concluding it as he wished. Other notes and changes indicate that at about this same time he did definitely replan the volume so as to make it into the present book in nearly its present form, and that this new plan was for a "real book," albeit one somewhat unconventional in form. I provide this information because I think it important to know that Peckham planned out, radically restructured at midcourse, and then completed this work—that it is not a fragment or "notes toward" a book—and that he revised the entire manuscript. As much, at least, as he ever revised anything.

* * *

The book's first two chapters trace Romanticism from Scott to Schubert. What is now a Coda (a word Peckham himself used in discussing the section entitled "Meditations on the Consequences of Romanticism") provides a synoptic account of the rest of the projected volumes in the series, but its narrative line is centered, as its title implies, directly on the theme of "consequences." (Readers of Peckham's three volumes of collected essays will be familiar with his dependence on the word; he thought of many of his shorter pieces as being "consequences" essays—for example, "The Deplorable Consequences of the Idea of Creativity" [in *Romanticism and Behavior*])—and hence grouped

them under "Consequences" in his tables of contents.) The "Meditations" section begins with Goya, Beethoven, and the young painter Richard Parkes Bonington; it ends with Freud, Joyce, Picasso, and a stunning summary account of Modernism itself, in which Peckham tells how some of the central Modernists brought Romanticism proper to a close:

What the Moderns did was to refuse so completely the cultural controls over both the form and semantic content of art that *only a few individuals could at first ascribe value to them and to their works*. What they did was to create their own cultural controls, a behavior made possible by alienation and also by the culture that made it value-laden to disobey certain cultural controls. That creation of one's own cultural controls is the "self." One may say, therefore, that only with the Moderns did the self emerge fully from the matrix of Romanticism. (210)

For Peckham, then, this was the end of the whole long story of Romanticism, and of the other long story of his attempt to tell it. It was how things had finally come out—with the creation of the twentieth-century notion of the self. But he should not be misunderstood on the point, for in fact his immense skepticism had always extended to the whole idea of the self (along with just about every other muddled idea), and he had early on cast *it* overboard too, writing as early as 1965: [The self] is not a metaphysical entity, something that really exists, but is only the sense of identity. . . . Thus value is not something that the self creates. *Value is the self*. The mere feeling that life is worth the trouble it takes to live it is what we are talking about when we use the word 'self.'"¹² Moreover,

The solution to the Romantic problem lies not in attempting the impossible, not in trying to stabilize the Self, but in continuous self-transformation, in continuously transcending tragedy, and comedy, and good, and evil. . . . With Nietzsche, Romanticism got to the root of its problem and found a stable solution to its difficulty in instability itself, in conceiving of life as the eternal possibility for continuous self-transformation. (*Romanticism: The Culture of the Nineteenth Century* 323)

In these 1965 statements about the self, we find Peckham, as ever, leading the way with an idea, albeit with few (knowing) followers. The congruence of this position with the positions of Lacan, Foucault, and Rorty—not to mention the myriad of postmodernists and post-structuralists who now hold it—will be obvious to people familiar with recent social and literary theory. It will be equally obvious that all of them, Peckham included, trace back to Nietzsche. But what will not be obvious to most such people is that Peckham's position (as I have tried to stress here, and have perhaps belabored) traces straight

back to Darwin, too—and that Darwin's primacy for Peckham's theories (of the self and everything else) may in the end keep him in the field after they have all gone the eternal way of fashion. For it is Darwin as well as Nietzsche who leads Peckham to the exit line at the end of *The Romantic Virtuoso* that sums up everything he most deeply believed, taught, and lived by: "Readiness is all." Future biographers of Morse Peckham, in casting about for book titles, could do worse.

NOTES

1. I note that my recounting of Peckham's theory-building follows the logic of its development rather than strict year-by-year chronology.

2. See the Bibliography for publication specifics regarding both Peckham's edition of the *Origin of Species* and the essay "Darwin and Darwinisticism," reprinted in his first collection of essays, *The Triumph of Romanticism*.

3. One of the most formidable works of social theory to appear in the last twenty years, *Explanation and Power* (1979; 1988) has met with unfathomable neglect and is now virtually forgotten (though still in print). For those seriously working along Peckham's lines, it is yet-to-be-discovered treasure, while for those seriously working along opposed lines it will prove more of a deeply buried yet unavoidable mine.

4. Peckham's Introduction to *Romanticism and Ideology* is a synopsis of the argument of *Explanation and Power*; it also appears as Appendix II of *The Birth of Romanticism 1790–1815*.

5. Still, Peckham did not believe at the end that the question (in his own self-parodying words), "What was Romanticism, really?" is a good one. In carrying his thinking as far as he could, he explicitly resisted (even his own) reductionist impulses, believing them to be (quite literally) atavistic. Late in his life, he wrote: "I believe in the inherent instability of theory construction, and I have endeavored to practice it" (*Romanticism and Ideology* 33).

6. Peckham helpfully provides this list in the introduction to *Romanticism and Ideology* (8); he also provides careful analyses of these topics in the eight essays on Romanticism listed above, all contained in his three volumes of collected essays, as well as in *Explanation and Power*. The best advice for readers wishing to go further is to consult the indexes to those works.

7. Peckham explains this point in several places. The briefest late discussion is *Romanticism and Ideology* 1–9; and with particular reference to literary language, 348), although the only thorough analysis is *Explanation and Power*, *passim*.

8. As others have correctly pointed out, however, Davidson and Rorty are themselves not nearly as close as Rorty thinks.

9. Peckham most succinctly presents his ideas on science in two essays, "Romanticism, Science, and Gossip" and "Literature and Behavior," both in *Romanticism and Ideology*.

10. Baudrillard is quite candid about his own affinities with the kind of "Romantic Manicheanism" posited here (see, for example, *Baudrillard Live* 139–40, 176, and *The Ecstasy of Communication*, *passim*). Raphael Salkie is helpful in showing how Chomsky's dualistic social libertarianism both links up