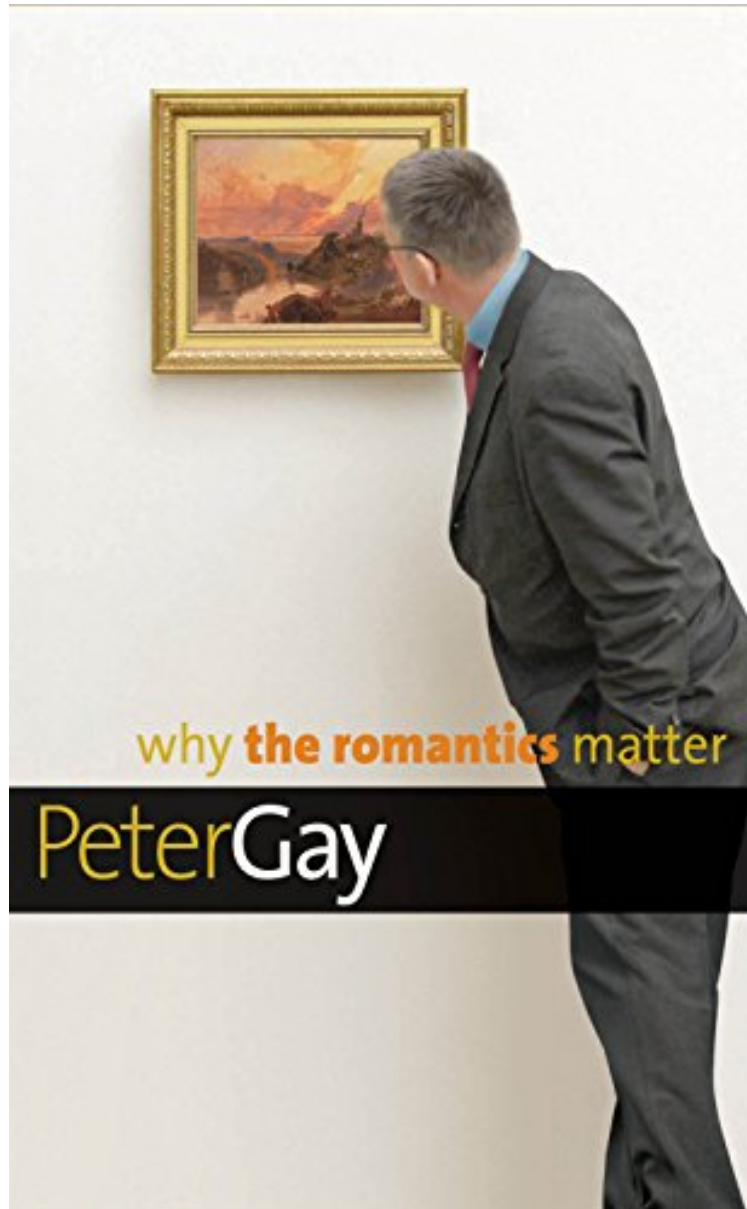


(Mobile ebook) Why the Romantics Matter (Why X Matters Series)

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Peter Gay

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Peter Gay : Why the Romantics Matter (Why X Matters Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Why the Romantics Matter (Why X Matters Series):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Peter Gay at His LeisureBy Richard B. SchwartzThe late Peter Gay's last book, Why the Romantics Matter is a small book (117 pp. plus notes and bibliography). The title is somewhat misleading, in that the answer to the implied question is something like the following: the romantics matter

because they inspired the modernists and many of the modernists are latter-day romantics. In assuming the romantics' desire to develop new and jarring art forms the modernists actually created classics. What appeared shocking for the moment has now expanded our view of art and immeasurably enriched our culture. Fair enough, but Gay offered a stellar and far-reaching study of this subject in his (640 pp.) 2010 book, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*. Anything he writes, however, is of potential interest. *Why the Romantics Matter* is a comfortable, informal discussion, best enjoyed in a soft chair with a glass of good sherry or a cup of hot tea. It takes a vast subject and looks at a few instances, examples, artists and art supporters. There are five chapters--'The Re-Enchantment of the World', Romantic Psychology, Middlemen as Pedagogues, Art for Artists' Sake, The Beethoven Decade--and an epilogue. He begins by acknowledging the mercurial nature of the subject. In 1924 A. O. Lovejoy published his landmark essay, 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms', his basic point being that 'romanticism' defies clear definition because it covers so many art forms, so many artists, so many countries and covers such a long historical period. Isaiah Berlin, e.g. (who refers to this problem in his own book on romanticism) traces many of the aspects of German romanticism to that country's experience in the Thirty Years War, while many would trace essential aspects of the experience of the English romantics to the French Revolution. There is very little in Gay's book concerning British romanticism, with the exception of a longish discussion on Oscar Wilde, who shares elements of the romantic spirit with earlier writers, but would not be included among the central figures of the movement--Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron and Blake. Gay is more interested in the German romantics and the French modernists. He is also more interested in painting and music than in poetry or architecture. Since the span and the conception of the book are so wide the case becomes attenuated. T. S. Eliot, e.g., is seldom thought of as a romantic writer, though Gay is at pains to link his modernism with romantic tendencies. I was surprised to see virtually no discussion of Kant, whose *Critique of Judgment* seems to me, and to many, to be a crucial element--across countries--in both romanticism and modernism. In fairness, the subject is vast, but Frye was able to offer some lovely definitional explanations for the concept of romanticism in his little book on the subject (1968). The bottom line, I think, is that this is Peter Gay 'at his leisure', discussing a subject (of which he has vast knowledge) in an informal, off-the-cuff manner. The book both informs and delights, but it does not offer definitions, historical outlines or a fresh view of an infinitely complex subject. It feels like an extended footnote to *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy*, which I would strongly recommend to all readers interested in art and culture. 9 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Or Do They? By Charlus Peter Gay is one of the pre-eminent cultural historians of Western Europe, having written seminal works on the Enlightenment, Victorian Culture and the Modernists. Here he ostensibly proposes to fill in the gap of the Romantics. After reading this work, I have my doubts he succeeded. He starts by explaining that there is not a single Romanticism but "Romanticisms", a concept he makes no claims to be original (Isaiah Berlin made a similar argument in his work on the subject). And the thread argument is how Romantic concepts, such as Art for Art's Sake, was picked up and transformed by the Modernists. That thread is frequently snapped and disappears for chapters at a time, while he discusses odds and ends about artists between 1870 and 1914, something he already did in his more expansive work, *Modernism*. A long tangent about the life and trials of Oscar Wilde seems to come out of nowhere. This is not to say that Mr Gay is ever dull or the ideas and people he examines are not without intrinsic interest. But a discussion about the relevancy of Romanticism, especially to contemporary times, is nowhere in evidence. The second to last chapter finally returns to an unarguable Romantic, Beethoven, but again, except for assuming his self-evident influence in music, no particular argument is made. The last chapter covers Freud, Kandinsky, Cezanne and any effort tying them to the Romantics is abandoned. So why do the Romantics matter? Hopefully the answer will be forthcoming in some future book.

With his usual wit and élan, esteemed historian Peter Gay enters the contentious, long-standing debates over the romantic period. Here, in this concise and inviting volume, he reformulates the definition of romanticism and provides a fresh account of the immense achievements of romantic writers and artists in all media. Gay's scope is wide, his insights sharp. He takes on the recurring questions about how to interpret romantic figures and their works. Who qualifies to be a romantic? What ties together romantic figures who practice in different countries, employ different media, even live in different centuries? How is modernism indebted to romanticism, if at all? Guiding readers through the history of the romantic movement across Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland, Gay argues that the best way to conceptualize romanticism is to accept its complicated nature and acknowledge that there is no 'single basket' to contain it. Gay conceives of romantics in 'families', whose individual members share fundamental values but retain unique qualities. He concludes by demonstrating that romanticism extends well into the twentieth century, where its deep and lasting impact may be measured in the work of writers such as T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf.

"With his usual deft, even chatty style, Peter Gay leads us through the paradoxes of the major European Romantics and documents their impact on Modernism. There is no page in his book that is not thoughtful and

witty."mdash;Geoffrey Hartman, author of *The Eighth Day: Poems Old and New*