



ROMANTICISM: REACTION AGAINST ENLIGHTENMENT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Romanticism was preceded by the philosophy of Neoclassicism. In the writings before this period humans were viewed as being limited and imperfect. A sense of reverence for order, reason, and rules were focused upon. There was distrust for innovation and invention. Society was encouraged to view itself as a group with generic characteristics. The idea of individualism was looked upon with disfavor. People were encouraged through literature, art, religion, and politics to follow the traditional rules of the church and government.

KEY –WORDS : Romanticism, Enlightenment Industrial Revolution, English Literature.

INTRODUCTION:-

During the second half of the 18th century economic and social changes took place in England. The country went through the so-called Industrial Revolution when new industries sprang up and new processes were applied to the manufacture of traditional products. During the reign of King George III (1760-1820) the face of England changed. The factories were built, the industrial development was marked by an increase in the export of finished cloth rather than of raw material, coal and iron industries developed. Internal communications were largely funded. The population increased from 7 million to 14 million people. Much money was invested in road and canal-building. The first railway line which was launched in 1830 from Liverpool to Manchester allowed many people inspired by poets of Romanticism to discover the beauty of their own country. Just as we understand the tremendous energizing influence of Puritanism in the matter of English liberty by remembering that the common people had begun to read, and that their book was the bible, so we may understand this age of popular government by remembering that the chief subject of romantic literature was the essential nobleness of common men and the value of the individual.

As we read now that brief portion of history which lies between the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the English Reform Bill of 1832, we are in the presence of such mighty political upheavals that the age of revolution" is the only name by which we can adequately characterize it. Its great historic movements become intelligible only when we read what was written in this period; for the French Revolution and the American Commonwealth, as well as the establishment of a true democracy in England by the Reform Bill, were the inevitable results of ideas which literature had spread rapidly through the civilized world. Liberty is fundamentally an ideal, and that ideal beautiful, inspiring, compelling—was kept steadily before men's minds by a multitude of books and pamphlets as far apart as Burns's Poems and Thomas Paine's Rights of Man—all read eagerly by the common people, all proclaiming the dignity of common life, and all uttering the same

passionate cry against every form of class or caste oppression. First the dream, the ideal in some human soul; then the written word which proclaims it, and impresses other minds with its truth and beauty; then the united and determined effort of men to make the dream a reality—that seems to be a fair estimate of the part that literature plays in the political progress of a country.

Romanticism was the greatest literary movement in the period between 1770-1840. It meant the shift of sensibility in art and literature and was based on interdependence of Man and Nature. It was a style in European art, literature and music that emphasized the importance of feeling, emotion and imagination rather than reason or thought. The Romantic Period of literature came into being in direct reaction against a variety of ideas and historical happenings taking place in England and Europe at that time. These happenings include the Napoleonic Wars and their following painful economic downfalls; the union with Ireland: the political movement known as Chartism, which helped to improve social recognition and conditions of the lower classes: the passage of the Reform Bill which suppressed slavery in the British Colonies, curbed monopolies, lessened poverty, liberalized marriage laws, and expanded educational facilities for the lower classes, it both accepted and despised the current philosophy of utilitarianism, a view in which the usefulness of everything, including the individual was based on how beneficial it was to Society. Finally, the most important factor to impact a change in both thought and literature was that of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution brought about vast changes in English society. It helped to create both great fortunes and great hardship. Within a short time England went from being a country of small villages with independent craftsmen to a country of huge factories run by sweat shops full of men, women, and children who lived in overcrowded and dangerous city slums. An industrial England was being born in pain and suffering. The presence of a developing democracy, the ugliness of the sudden growth of cities, the prevalence of human pain, the obvious presence of the "profit motive" all helped to characterize what was in many respects "the best of times. the worst of times."

In England the Romantic authors were individuals with many contrary views. But all of them were against immoral luxuries of the world, against injustice and inequality of the society, against suffering and human selfishness.

The period of Romanticism in England had its peculiarities. The Romantic writers of England did not call themselves romanticists (like their French and German contemporaries). Nevertheless, they all depicted the interdependence of Man and Nature. The Romantic writers based their theories on the intuition and the wisdom of the heart. On the other hand, they were violently stirred by the suffering of which they were the daily witnesses. They hoped to find a way of changing the social order by their writing, they believed in literature being a sort of Mission to be carried out in order to reach the wisdom of the Universe.

Reaction Against Enlightenment

Romanticism appeared in conflict with the Enlightenment. You could go as far as to say that Romanticism reflected a crisis in Enlightenment thought itself, a crisis which shook the comfortable 18th century philosophe out of his intellectual single-mindedness. The Romantics were conscious of their unique destiny. In fact, it was self-consciousness which appears as one of the keys elements of Romanticism itself.

The philosophes were too objective -- they chose to see human nature as something uniform. The philosophes had also attacked the Church because it blocked human reason. The Romantics attacked the Enlightenment because it blocked the free play of the emotions and creativity. The philosophe had turned man into a soulless, thinking machine -- a robot. In a comment typical of the Romantic thrust, William Hazlitt (1778-1830) asked, "For the better part of my life all I did was think." And William Godwin (1756-1836), a contemporary of Hazlitt's asked, "what shall I do when I have read all the books?" Christianity had formed a matrix into which medieval man situated himself. The Enlightenment replaced the Christian matrix with the mechanical matrix of Newtonian

natural philosophy. For the Romantic, the result was nothing less than the demotion of the individual. Imagination, sensitivity, feelings, spontaneity and freedom were stifled -- choked to death. Man must liberate himself from these intellectual chains.

Like one of their intellectual fathers, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), the Romantics yearned to reclaim human freedom. Habits, values, rules and standards imposed by a civilization grounded in reason and reason only had to be abandoned. "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains," Rousseau had written. Whereas the philosophes saw man in common that is, as creatures endowed with Reason the Romantics saw divers and unianess. That is, those traits which set one man apart from another, and traits which set one nation apart from another. Discover yourself -- express yourself, cried the Romantic artist. Play your own music, write your own drama, paint your own personal vision, live, love and suffer in your own way. So instead of the motto, "Sapere aude," "Dare to know!" the Romantics took up the battle cry, "Dare to be!" The Romantics were rebels and they knew it. They dared to march to the tune of a different drummer -- their own. The Romantics were passionate about their subjectivism, about their tendency toward introspection. Rousseau's autobiography, *The Confessions* (1781), began with the following words:

I am commencing an undertaking, hitherto without precedent and which will never find an imitator. I desire to set before my fellows the likeness of a man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself. Myself alone! I know the feelings of my heart, and I know men. I am not made like any of those I have seen. I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different.

Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution -- in full swing in England since the 1760s -- spread to the Continent in the 1820s, thus adding entirely new social concerns. The old order -- politics and the economy -- seemed to be falling apart and hence for many Romantics, raised the threat of moral disaster as well. Men and women faced the need to build new systems of discipline and order, or, at the very least, they had to reshape older systems. The era was prolific in innovative ideas and new art forms. Older systems of thought had to come to terms with rapid and apparently unmanageable change.

The Romantics defined the Enlightenment as something to which they were clearly opposed. The philosophes oversimplified. But Enlightenment thought was and is not a simple and clearly identifiable thing. In fact, what has often been identified as the Enlightenment bore very little resemblance to reality. As successors to the Enlightenment, the Romantics were often unfair in their appreciation of the 18th century. They failed to recognize just how much they shared with the philosophes. In doing so, the Romantics were similar to Renaissance humanists in that both failed to perceive the meaning and importance of the cultural period which had preceded their own. The humanists, in fact, invented a "middle age" so as to define themselves more carefully. As a result, the humanists enhanced their own self-evaluation and prestige in their own eyes. The humanists foisted an error on subsequent generations of thinkers. Their error lay in their evaluation of the past as well as in their simple failure to apprehend or even show a remote interest in the cultural heritage of the medieval world. Both aspects of the error are important.

It was during the French Revolution and for fifty or sixty years afterward that the Romantics clarified their opposition to the Enlightenment. This opposition was based on equal measures of truth and fiction. The Romantics rejected what they thought the philosophes represented. And over time, the Romantics came to oppose and criticize not only the Enlightenment, but also ideas derived from it and the men who were influenced by it.

Romanticism reveals the persistence of Enlightenment thought, the Romantic's definition of themselves and a gradual awareness of a new enemy. The shift to a new enemy reminds us that the Romantic Age was also an eclectic age. The Enlightenment was no monolithic structure -- neither was Romanticism, however we define it. Ideas of an age seldom exist as total systems. Our labels too easily let us forget that past ideas from the context in which new ideas are developed and

expressed. Intellectuals do manage to innovate and their innovations are oftentimes not always recombinations of what they have embraced in their education.

The Enlightenment was rationalist -- it glorified human reason. Reason illustrated the power of analysis -- Reason was the power of associating like experiences in order to generalize about them inductively. Reason was a common human possession -- it was held by all men. Even

American "savages" were endowed with reason, hence the 18th century emphasis on "common sense," and the "noble savage." Common sense -- revealed by reason -- would admit a groundwork for a common morality. As nature was studied in order to discover its universal aspects, men began to accept that what was most worth knowing and what was therefore most valuable, was what they had in common with one another. Society, then, became an object of science. Society revealed self-evident truths about human nature -- self-evident truths about natural rights.

CONCLUSION:

The Romantics felt all the opinions of the Enlightenment were fraught with dangerous errors and oversimplifications. Romanticism may then be considered as a critique of the inadequacies of what it held to be Enlightened thought. The critique of the Romantics -- sometime open, sometimes hidden -- can be seen as a new study of the bases of knowledge and of the whole scientific enterprise.

Truth and beauty were human attributes. A truth and beauty which emanated from the poet's soul and the artist's heart. If the poets are, as Shelley wrote in 1821, the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," it was world of fantasy, intuition, instinct and emotion. It was a human world.

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