

Romanticism Revisited: Exploring the Intersection of Romanticism with Enlightenment and Transcendentalism Through the Lens of the Neoclassicism

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ABSTRACT

Romanticism originated in the last decades of the 18th century and peaked in the first half of the 19th century. Besides adoration for nature, the most significant aspect of the movement was the emphasis that it laid on profound emotion as the genuine source of aesthetic experience with remarkable inclination towards apprehension, terror, horror and awe with respect to sublimity. Romanticism spotlighted the exemplary achievements of “Heroic” individuals who were capable of setting up high standards for emulation. Although Romanticism mainly dealt with visual arts, music and literature, it heavily influenced historiography, socialism, naturalism, liberalism, conservatism and nationalism. Derivative art was highly disregarded by Romantics who believed that influence of works of other artists stood in the way of creativity. They held that “Romantic originality” was to be achieved through the process of creation from nothingness. Like any other Art movement, Romanticism was on the wane after a few decades, but it has always had an expansive influence not only on different branches of art but on life itself.

Keywords: Romanticism, Sturm and Drang, Enlightenment, Rationalism, Neoclassicism, Idealism, Transcendentalism.

INTRODUCTION

Romanticism, also known as The Romantic Revival, is one of the most dominant movements in the history of Arts and Literature. Stretching from the 1770s to the mid Nineteenth century, it was mainly a European movement widespread and popular in Britain, France and Germany. Countries like Italy, Spain, Poland South America and many more in North America were also considerably influenced by this movement. Romanticism had an extremely varied range of artistry. The Transcendentalism movement in America also had its roots in the thoughts and ideas of Romanticism (James Parker; 2019).

Many art and literary movements in the history of the world have originated and developed as a reaction to the preponderance of the notions, ideas and canons of the preceding period. The Romantic Revival was very much in line with this trend because Enlightenment had influenced Neoclassicism heavily and these two movements had set up and practised philosophical, artistic and literary values that were almost poles asunder from those of the Romantics. As opposed to the purely rationalistic features of Neoclassicism, Romantics greatly emphasized emotion, imaginative spontaneity, self expression and individual feeling. The Romantic period was largely permeable to the Classical era. The Romantics believed that the cultural and intellectual achievements of Greek and Roman times greatly contributed to the foundations of western civilization. Nature was a source of sensuousness, love and awe to them. The kind of feelings Romanticism

externalized clearly reminded one of religious devotion irrespective of the creeds of the artists adhering to the movement. Romanticism took the world by storm by virtue of its intensity and it could afford to boast of an extremely varied range of artistry (Jerome, J McGann;1986).

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the Romantic Revival is one of the most talked about literacy and art movements, the critical activities on it are vast and expansive. A comprehensive review of such literature is beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, an encapsulation of the total work is presented below. Although the word **Romantic** is derived from the old French word **romanz**, which evolves from the **romance** languages that developed from Latin, it has come a far way off from its etymological root. We can trace back to the medieval times for the use of the words 'romance' and 'romantic' while the term 'romanticism' has been in use to denote a special kind of intellectual experience since the 18th and the 19th century. The word '**romantic**' became a part of common English usage in the 18th century. It was used to encompass a wide range of taste for the picturesque and the fanciful (James Parker; 2019).

However, 'romantic' had been in use since the Renaissance to suggest free expression of imagination in the Arts, but in a negative sense. It was looked down upon as a kind of imagination that interfered with the clarity of art forms. The emerging Romantic spirit of the 18th century England was seen by some as a revival of Elizabethan literature and its 'Gothic' tendencies. English Romanticism has also been described as 'renaissance of the Renaissance' (Punter.David;1996).

Largely due to the influence of late 18th century German Cultural theorists, 'Romanticism' was accepted across England and the New World as a convenient description for contemporary modes of thought and many of the associated negative connotations were got rid of. Instead of improbable notions and false sensibility, Romanticism now stood for authority, integrity and spontaneity. It was seen as a positive and intellectual assertion. Artistic visions soon got connected with prospects of social transition (Peter Thorslev. Detroit; 2002).

Nature offers the Romantic myriad experiences and serves as a source of joy, sorrow, fear and awe which lead him to a thorough scan of the individual self. One of the most significant aspects of Romanticism is the power of imagination it imparts in an individual. Various disciplines of creative art were heavily influenced by this movement. Intellect and psyche are generally regarded as conflicting human faculties. At times, however, they act as complementary factors. The human mind, very much like the human intellect, is unique. Quite often, this uniqueness naturally represents the characteristics of an artist of any discipline.

As romanticism is the over-pouring of the emotions of a sincere craving heart, the art form almost always bears the signature of the artist. As a result, artistic creations are sometimes very much autobiographical in nature.

"Romanticism took for granted that the origins of the work could be found in the life of the writer" (Belsey, C; 2016).

One of the most inseparable adjuncts of Romanticism, like Gothic, is **the sublime**. Although the Romantic Sublime is not identical with the philosophical Sublime, the awe-generating features are certainly traceable in both the domains. Edmund Burke's Philosophical Enquiry (1757) linked the sublime with feelings and experiences of awe, terror and danger. Burke saw Nature as the most sublime object, capable of generating the strongest sensations in its beholders. This Romantic conception of the sublime proved influential for several generations of artists and philosophers.

In a way or the other, the power and puissance of the sublime has rarely been totally absent from the arena of creativity. To some critics, the driving force of Romantic creativity was to have an enormous influence on even modern art.

"The whole exuberance, anarchy and violence of modern art ... its unrestrained, unsparing exhibitionism, is derived from [Romanticism]. And this subjective, egocentric attitude has become so much a matter of course for us ... that we find it impossible to reproduce even an abstract train of thought without talking about our own feelings" (Hauser A.; 1999).

In a word, Romanticism had tremendous influence on various branches of Arts in its heyday. And as its root is deep in the human psyche and, despite its apparent conflict with rationality, has had a perpetual influence on the human mind in general, we can still see and feel an almost all-pervasive presence of the spirit and essence of the movement all around us.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Romanticism has always been a matter of curiosity and enchantment since its inception. Despite the immense popularity it has enjoyed, there has been a deplorable dearth of understanding of it. Besides there have been instances of undue criticisms and undermining of this movement from time to time. Therefore, new and newer studies and researches are always essential for a fuller understanding of Romanticism. It is exactly for this reason that this article has been constructed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective: The general objective of the study is to know more about Romanticism, its evolution and the influence it has had on artists and connoisseurs.

Specific Objective: The specific objective of the study is to know about the inception of the movement; the formative influences it had; its growth, expansion and its impact on the present day civilization.

METHODOLOGY

The method of the study is qualitative. Huge amount of study materials was used for Literature Review and Discussion. The materials were examined, evaluated and commented on and a specific concise topic was chosen for the study. The scope of the study was also determined. General findings were noted on the basis of the availability of resources. The materials were approached both chronologically and thematically. The available materials were evaluated properly for their premise, methodology and evaluation. The key findings were summarized and justification for the study was established. Finally, Romanticism was viewed from different perspectives retrospectively.

Source of Materials: Huge amount of materials available in the library and online was collected on a cumulative basis for the study.

Range of the Study: As we all know, Romanticism basically originated in Germany. But it expected dramatically conquering ethnic and cultural differences. In fact, the phenomenal movement eventually swept across a major part of the world. In keeping with this, the range of the study has been quite expansive but the essence extracted from the study is a small and concentrated.

MAIN DISCUSSION

High Romanticism: Sturm And Drang



According to Ben Johnson, the age of High Romanticism made the world a focus for hopes of revolution and social changes in the future. It became a political dream.

It was no more regarded as improbable; rather it stood for authenticity, integrity and sincerity. Now it was viewed as a very positive artistic and intellectual assertion covering huge areas beyond logic and reason. About 40 years after Johnson's evaluation, the famous German critic and philosopher Friedrich von Schlegel used the term Romanticism to describe contemporary forms of artistic expression. In view of this, Johnson can be viewed upon as a perfect predictor who saw how Romanticism was going to shape ideas and actions in many parts of the world. Herder's "storm of history" briefly became a reality during the turbulent decade of the 1770s. The first stirrings of Romanticism appeared at this time in the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) Movement, which took its name from a 1776 play by Friederich Klinger (1752-1831). Klinger was an orphan and a protégé of Goethe, the leading light of the movement. Reaching its climax well before the French Revolution, Sturm und Drang was a rehearsal for the full-scale Romantic movement at the turn of the century Sturm und Drang was marked by Herder's nationalism, a Rousseau-like idealism and faith in nature, scorn for artistic convention, the idea of individual experience (Erlebnis) as central to the creation of art – and belief in the power of genius.

Politics And Romanticism



Much of this happened mainly due to the impact of two political revolutions in France (1789) and in America (1776). The industrial revolution, which was rapidly changing agrarian lifestyle, also had a silent but big role to play.

These changes resulted in an altered outlook and attitude to life now, the true Romantic was viewed as not an over-sensitive dreamer, but as a heroic personality challenging the crises he found himself face to face with. The puissant surge of Romanticism took human sensibility far beyond the range of contemporary thought in many ways. For example, the mysterious process of Romantic thinking was so intensely and predominantly portrayed in German Romanticism that it could be traced as the forerunner of surrealist Automatism.

Some critics even viewed the romantic upsurge as the origin of all the upheaval that Modern art caused.

"Automatism can be read as the culmination of an aspect of French Romanticism, taking up Rimbaud's programme of a derangement of all the senses to deliver the writer's habitual self over to a realm in which 'I is another'" (Clark T.; 1997).

The incidents and events that took place in the preceding periods of time had a very important role to play in shaping the Romantic Movement. We all know what an impact the French Revolution had on the Romantic stalwarts. But it was also the cumulative influence of industrial Revolution that played a very significant role in the growth of the movement. It was partly a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, the aristocratic social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment, and the scientific rationalization of nature – all of which are components of modernity. It was embodied most strongly in the visual arts, music, and literature, but had a major impact on historiography, education, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. It had a significant and complex effect on politics, with romantic thinkers influencing liberalism, radicalism, conservatism and nationalism (Morrow, J.; 2011).

Inherent Vulnerability of Enlightenment and Neoclassicism



Enlightenment itself, in a sense, was responsible for the vulnerabilities it appeared to suffer from. One of the side effects of this movement was to discover the unexplored domains of the material world. In trying to discover the divine order of the causes beneath the natural systems, it ended up frustrated and was perplexed to see and know how vast, unexpectedly complex and impenetrable the physical world was. It is interesting to note that Sir Humphrey Davy's reaction to this frustration was rather Romantic in nature.

Though we can perceive, develop and even produce by means of our instruments of experiment, an almost infinite variety of minute phenomena, yet we are incapable of determining the general laws by which they are governed: and in attempting to define them, we are lost in obscure though sublime imaginings concerning unknown agencies.

The sense of the sublime (meaning the exalted, the awe-inspiring') was used more and more to bridge the gap between the limitations of human faculties of understating and the unimaginable infinity of the universe.

The 'Grand Tour' in Italy is a unique example of this paradoxical phenomenon. The sons of wealthy British and other North European families were sent to Italy to explore for themselves the residual glories of the classical civilization. They had to pass the splendid wilderness of the Alps, which was the quintessence of the Sublime in Nature. Thomas Gray in his poetry and Gothic writer Horace Walpole in his novels gave early descriptions of the Sublime based on their wonderings and trips across the Alps.

The Sublime, by any considerations, was one of the most striking ideas in for Eighteenth century Romanticism. We all know that the Romanticists were averse to abiding by too much of theories and philosophies. But they certainly accepted quite a bit of the philosophical Sublime. Wordsworth and Coleridge, the two stalwarts of Romantic Literature, were considerably influenced by the ideas related to the Sublime. Shelley and a couple of other Romanticists also showed their keen sense of appreciation for some ideas related to the Sublime.

In Tintern Abbey, having realised the lack of harmony and perfection in human behavior and action, Wordsworth turns to nature with a kind of devotion that clearly similar to the religious sense of awe and reverence. The diction, language and imagery are consistently compatible with the rules he established in 1802 Preface to Lyrical Ballads. Bearing the fact in mind that the poem is the quintessence of Wordsworth's artistic perceptions and poetic vision of the first phase of his creative life and heralds much of what followed, it can be stated that the Sublime had a very significant role to play in developing his poetic consciousness.

Coleridge advocated that the Sublime must be considered in a much greater context and not independently. He points out that very few objects and entities like the sky are illimitable, and so, are appertaining to the Sublime in the conventional sense of the term. To provide comprehensiveness to his idea of the Sublime, he opines that the objects of nature like mountain, though not illimitable, should be and in fact are considered to be a part of the Sublime owing to their vastness and grandeur. Besides Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley upholds the greatness of nature and expresses his conviction that the significance of nature could not be fully understood by mankind. In Mont Blanc he reveals how emotions act to teach humans to respect the awe-inspiring grandeur of nature.

Enlightenment Was More Than Just Rationality

The great Swiss philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau believed that Enlightenment could not have been irrevocably rationalistic. The emotional and visionary edge that he gave to the 18th century philosophy had the glimpses of a prototype Romantic. In the very first place of Confessions, we can perceive his Proto-

romantic creed. To Rousseau, Nature was less oppressive to many than society and civilization were. Rousseau's influence on Romantic movements was immense. Rousseau's analysis of Romanticism was to be of lasting importance in the following ways;

- He anticipated the Romantic obsession with individual subjectivity.
- His individual, subjective approach to morality encouraged Immanuel Kant to develop his ambitious reform of philosophy, which was deeply influential on Romantic thinking.
- His ecstatic visionary communication with the natural world was developed by the Sturm and Drang movement and paradoxically led to the Romantic dilemma of the separation of the individual from the external world-- the division of subject and object.
- His ideas were adopted (or rather hijacked) by the theorists of the French Revolution. In *The Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau proposed "general will" of the citizens. The chilling invocation of this "general will" by the French revolutionaries justified the worst excesses of the Reign of Terror.

Another significant aspect of Rousseau was that he could relate Romanticism and revolution much more effectively than many others. The English Romantic essayist William Hazlitt opined that Rousseau was "revolutionary" on both personal and political levels, and central to the close association between Romanticism and Revolution.

Idealizing Reality

Born twelve years after Rousseau, Immanuel Kant (1721-1804) was another parent of Romanticism – the Enlightenment's "problem child". Kant's idealism unwittingly lit the fuse for the Romantic revolution in epistemology - the theory of knowledge, which asks how we know what we know, and how reliable our basis of knowledge is.

Kant stated in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) that there are categories (concepts such as space, time, cause, effect) inherent to the human mind which determine a priori (I .e. prior to our experience) how we make sense of the world. In the colloquial sense of the word, Classicism and Romanticism both tended to "idealize" reality. But in the strictly philosophical sense, idealism had a crucial role to play in the transition from the Classical to the Romantic world-view.

To my mind, a very short analysis of the nature of idealism would not be entirely out of place here as idealizing reality is being taken into consideration:

Philosophically speaking, Idealism is a kind of belief which holds that perceptions are 'ideas' related to the contents of our minds and what we know as 'real' is essentially psychical. The 'idea' is therefore our basis for knowledge and is in direct contrast to Materialism which states that nothing exists other than matter and its movements. In a sense, Idealism originates from Plato's theory of 'Ideal Forms' lying behind the visible reality. Quite consistently with Plato, Kant conceived of an ideal world of unknowable things "as-they-are-in-themselves" (noumena), distinct from the material world of knowable things "as-they-appear" to our senses (phenomena). Phenomena, as we grasp them, are very much limited within the framework of physical senses. In Romanticism, the human is the subjective centre of knowledge and, therefore, extrapolating from Kant, opens up tremendous possibilities for further expansion of human knowledge.

Like any other literary, intellectual, artistic or philosophical movement, perhaps, Romanticism had to be on the wane. When it was past its prime time, criticisms started and continued. Some criticisms, later on, were far from being kind to its wonderful creativity.

"[Romanticism is] that attempt, apparently doomed to failure and abandoned by our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature" (Wellek R; 1963).

CONCLUSION

As we all know, almost every branch of human knowledge was influenced by Romanticism. But it is perplexing to think that profound individualism and chauvinistic nationalism thrived in that same very period. To find answer to this baffling question is not within the scope of this article. But what cannot be denied at all is that the force and charm of Romanticism is very difficult to undermine. It should also not be forgotten how it swept across the face of the earth and revolutionized ideas and creativity in almost all domains. And are we at all sure that we have got over the influence of this seemingly all-pervasive creative force even after a couple of centuries of the point of time when the movement was at its zenith?

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