



From Economy to Ecology: Romantic Disillusionment

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Abstract

Distraught reality and disillusioned youth though the reality of war is always the same but misapprehension about it has time and again blurred the vision of generations. Be it the expeditions of Britain or the ‘French Revolution’ one staggering emotion has always held the youth bound to the glory attached to war i.e., liberation. Therefore, the romantic age poets namely Wordsworth, Coleridge, PB Shelley or Lord Byron though they never promoted violence and bloodshed of the war-front, still they could not escape from the dazzled glory of war. Owing to the ignition of the world, the current of romanticism found its roots in the very soil of nature, thereby came the primitive radical attitude. Edward Dowden, prominent Victorian critic, viewed ‘French Revolution’ as an expounding force that framed the ideology of romanticism and intertwines in the pretext of major works of the era. These romantic writers were stirred from the belittling attitude of government towards nature and citizens. Romanticism was slowly but steadily ushering on the frontier of liberty, equality and fraternity further strengthening the dilemma of war being fruitful for the common man. In this paper, we aim to actualize the reality of war being romanticized by poets to the extremity of squandering their own life in it.

Keywords: French Revolution, romanticism, ecology, economy, conservatism

Transition from Radicalism to Conservatism

With the declaration of Jean Jacques Rousseau in his notable work *The Social Contract*:

“Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains”

Which unleashed the era of revolutions with intellectuals challenging the established notions which brought out as a reaction against the absolute bureaucracy to the liberation of the common man. Finding recluse in nature and spirituality these romantic poets somehow attempted to transcend from troubles and vanity of their generation. PB Shelley in his *Defense of poetry* stated that: *“Poets are unacknowledged legislators of the world”* which made a strong case for the romantic ideals as in literature too it came as an outrage to the neoclassical tradition. Earlier, the

poetic language was a bit highbrow and elite making it inaccessible to marginalized people, thereby Wordsworth composed his lyrical ballads in the language of the common man (Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, 1802). Drawing instances from the very first of the romantics William Blake's outrageous spirit against the government can be witnessed in works like *London* where he's not only empathizing with the problems of the chimney sweeps but also making a case for the torments of soldiers and prostitutes. There is a dire pounding of reinstating natural world in the writings of this era with poets like ST Coleridge in his *Frost at Midnight* calling nature as a "*Great universal teacher*". There the question arises that poets who worship nature find solace in imagination and beauty on what presets can promote war? The answer to which lies in the disillusionment of war that glorifies the promising liberty and equality. According to Wordsworth, in his *The French Revolution as it Appeared to Enthusiasts at its Commencement*, French Revolution was such a celebratory moment that:

"Bliss was in that dawn to be alive,

but to be young was very heaven"

Though this wave of romanticism wants to reclaim the people back from superfluous conventions of life towards the simplistic pleasures of nature. This reclaiming became a fervent thunderous roar with the humanitarian slogan of Rousseau, "Equality, Fraternity and Brotherhood". This amalgamation of standing for democratic rights of people and emancipating them from bondage comes with a simultaneous call from nature. For Legouis and Cazamian, romanticism was "*an accentuated predominance of emotional life, provoked and directed by imaginative vision.*" French revolution was an unprecedented time of chaos and speculations since the revolution is channelised by the common taxpaying gentry of France it ought to be about a democratic issue. Further, extending the boundaries of romantic ideal of individualism to a more lucrative yearning for liberty, writers found there very heaven in French revolution's democratic call. Wordsworth became the driving force for this cause of freedom by fervently arguing in his works for a reawakening of people and joining hands with nature. "*The world is too much with us; late and soon, getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: Little we see in Nature that is ours.*" Sprawling over the boundaries of neoclassical uptight notions romanticism grew and with its stifled spontaneity attacked the French monarchy and favoured anarchism. Advocating his points Wordsworth wrote *Conventions of Cintra, 1808* favouring romantic militarism and propounding his views on "suffering Spain" where he ascribed people to not follow policy but to advocate for principle. French revolution not only came as a way to procure and reclaim the spirit of man but along the way it reignited the lethargy of industrialised spirit and shook all the dust from the way

to the garden and in the lap of nature. From the view of first-generation romantics, war has sanctity when conjugated with nature which is more like bringing a sword in the hands of righteous. Thereby adhering to the steps of Wordsworth, the second most eminent poet of the romantic era Samuel Taylor Coleridge clarifies his stance on the French revolution in the work *France: an ode*. Initiating his argument with the invocation of nature and the devotional love for it illuminate the minds of the readers about their heartfelt submission to the world of mysticism. Coleridge in *France: an ode* gave his exulted mindful view for the revolution and a steadfast abhorrence of alliance against the republic. In alignment with the romantic delusion for revolution, Coleridge not only sees it as a triumphant journey but also regarded an oppositional view as a transient storm.

*“When France her front deep-scarr’d and glory,
Concealed with clustering wreaths of glory”*

In this work, Coleridge is simultaneously treading his way from musing for war to his pantheist love for nature.

*“Have made a solemn music of the wing!
Where, like a man beloved of god”*

Owing to his anticipations for the French revolution he time and again presents a natural and rooted way of living as the most optimal kind of lifestyle. Even in his *Ode on the Departing Year*, he blatantly predicts the future of Britain if it joins hands with the tyrants against France. With an unnerving admiration for the idyllic life amid the turbulent atmosphere of Europe followed by the beheading of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. Lament on the tyranny of war and exploits of humanly lust for power ‘*departing year! t’was on no earthly shore My soul beheld thy vision!*’. This apocalypse has berefted the world of its presumed glory into mere ashes.

In the end, finding their lives in the woods both Wordsworth and Coleridge became conservatives with shattered delusions for the falsified glory of the revolution. Bending their views towards the higher echelons, left these first-generation romantics as a point of mockery for the later romantics like Shelley and Byron. Being radical in views is the founding and rather driving force of the whole romantic movement which thrust individuality. Leaving this very lineage by choosing a more conventional stance in life cleared this delusional notion of French Revolution being something to be fantasized or even thought to be fruitful.

Conclusion

Shifting paradigms of romantic ideals have an unprecedented impression on generations which not only teaches us that *Return to nature* is an unequivocal call of life and no liberty is to be found with dismantled federations of political ambivalence. With a lust for power and greed in mind nations only digresses to mere economic juncture and not an entity thriving on lively beings. Therefore, these prominent poets of the era in their early phase of life took stand for the French revolution but after their close introspection in the events parted ways with violence rendering to no liberty of people. Their rebelliousness soon shifted to laying back on nature as the only recluse in life. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge's early dazzled mind with falsified glory of war with the unfolding of the French Revolution became redundant to the rut of life finding their true heaven only in the realms of the natural world.

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