



Romance and Romantic: a Revaluation of Deprecated Terms

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ABSTRACT:

This study seeks to underscore the prominent role played by the medieval romances and the nineteenth-century romantics in English literature despite the fact that the words 'romance' and 'romantic' are both – and to the present day – belittled as pertaining to the derogatory sense of 'unreality'. In revaluation, this paper highlights that the verse narratives spread by the troubadours throughout Western Europe were behind the birth of the Romance Spanish, French, Italian and other languages derived from Latin. As well, those romances, which countered the epic, have established the present genre of the novel – called 'roman' in all European languages except English. More significantly, the knights of the Middle Ages, immortalized by the romance, were the first in European history to value woman as a partner in love for the sake of whom a knight undertook his quest. On the other hand, Romanticism, which emerged in Germany on the philosophical tenets of Immanuel Kant and Jean Jacque Rousseau, came to dominate the literary scene during the 19th century and challenge the firmly established rationality of the Enlightenment era. In England, the poets Blake, Byron, Shelley, and others introduced the voice of the individual who rebels against the confines upon the freedom of the human soul. Both the romance and the romantic tendency suffered fierce attacks starting from the monarchy of the 14th century to the conservatives of the Victorian period. Even the Modernists of the 20th century maintained a deprecating view of romanticism and described it as a period of chaos.

Key words: *romance, romantic, Romanticism*

المستخلص:

يهدف هذه البحث للتأكيد على الدور المفصلي الذي أدته السرديات الرومانسية في القرون الوسطى والرومانتيكيون في القرن التاسع عشر في مسيرة الأدب الإنجليزي رغم أن المفردتين "رومانسي" و "رومانتيكي" لا تزالان تحملان في تعريفهما دلالة سالبة حيث تشيران الى ما هو غير واقعي ومن ثم غير عملي. وفي مسعى لاعادة التقييم، تتولى هذه الورقة التنويه الى أن السرديات الشعرية التي نشرها شعراء التروبادور في غرب أوروبا كانت وراء ميلاد العديد من اللغات (والمسماة باللغات الرومانسية) المشتقة عن اللاتينية مثل الاسبانية والفرنسية والايطالية وغيرها. كما أن هذه السرديات – بخصائصها المغايرة للملحمة – قامت بالتأسيس لجنس الرواية (والتي تسمى "رومان" في كل اللغات الأوروبية عدا الانجليزية). والأجدر بالذكر أن فرسان العصور الوسطى، وحسبما تم تخليدهم في حكاوي الرومانس، كانوا أول من أعطوا تقديراً للأنثى بوصفها كائناتاً يستحق الاحتراف به والخروج للقتال من أجله. أما الرومانتيكيون فقد استعاروا المبادئ الفلسفية التي دفع بها الفيلسوفن ايمانويل كانط وجان جاك روسو ليناهاضوا العقلانية التي وطّدتها حركة التنوير التي سادت الفكر الأوروبي خلال القرن الثامن عشر. وفي انجلترا تبنى الشعراء الرومانتيكيون أمثال وليام بليك ويايرون وشيلي وغيرهم صوت الفرد (البطل) الذي يتحدى قولبة الروح الإنسانية ويدعو لحريتها. وترصد الدراسة الهجمات الشرسة التي تعرض لها فرسان الرومانس والنزعة الرومانتيكية منذ ملكية القرن الرابع عشر وحتى محافظي الحقبة الفكتورية (1838-1901) ليحذوا حذوهم طليعيوا فترة الحداثة الذين وصموا الرومانتيكيين بالفوضوية.

كلمات مفتاحية: رومانس، رومانتيكي، الحركة الرومانسية.

INTRODUCTION:



The romance, as a literary creativity, is known to date back to the ancient Greeks - during the second and third centuries - whose works were written in prose to describe how two lovers overcome difficulties before they were eventually united. A similar experience was faced by the knights of the Middle Ages and was immortalized by romances narrated in verse and distributed by the troubadours throughout Western Europe about ten centuries later. And, in England, a group of poets came to revive the spirit of the knights of those romances and dominated the literary scene in the nineteenth century when they countered the rationality established by neoclassicism during the era of the Enlightenment.

Objectives of the Research

This paper aims first to underscore the significance of the romance in the history of English literature, second to highlight its influence on the later movement of Romanticism, and third to delineate on what grounds were both deprecated.

Research Questions

- What is the contribution made by the romance to English literature?
- To what extent is Romanticism influential on literature?
- Who took to deprecate the romance and the romantic tendency in literature?

Significance of the Research

This study is intended to draw the attention to the important role played by the romance on the aspects of language, the genre of the novel and the position of woman in Western Europe as well as the contribution made by the Romantics to literature.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background:

The Oxford as well as The Cambridge Advanced Learner's dictionaries define the adjective 'Romance' (in capital letter) as the language

developed from Latin, while the same word is introduced as a noun (in small letter) to denote a story of exciting events and adventure and also to mean the feeling of adventure or mystery. In the same disapproving sense, the adjective 'romantic' and the nouns 'romantic' and 'Romanticism' are defined in the Oxford Dictionary as pertaining to literature that is not related to real life. And the verb 'to romance' means to tell stories that are not true or to describe something in a way that makes it seem more exciting or interesting than it really is. Other entries connect the word romantic with the word 'lover', following the general idea of 'romantic love' which originated from the French culture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The term 'romance' dates to the Middle Ages when the Franks, who spoke a Germanic language akin to Dutch, conquered Gaul and made it France. The Gallo-Romans distinguished themselves against the French or Frankish language of their conquerors by speaking 'romants'. Romants, or 'romanus', maintained itself as the spoken or vernacular form of Latin while the use of the learned language – Latin itself – was confined to the church and court. Derived from this stem are the adverb 'romanz' which means to translate or compose books in the vernacular, and the nouns 'Romanz, roman, romanzo' which, according to Childs and Fowler (2006; 208), were associated with the content of non-didactic verse narratives, like *Sir Gawain and the Green Knights*, whose subject matter was usually ideal love and the medieval ideal of chivalric adventure.

The word 'romance' has ultimately developed with other meanings in other languages, such as the early 19th century Spanish and Italian definitions of 'adventurous' and 'passionate', sometimes combining the idea of 'love affair' or 'idealistic beauty'. And the adjective



'Romance', as afore-said, is still the adjective for all the daughter languages of Latin; French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian...etc.

The Cultural and Literary Heritage of the Romance:

Long narrative romances in prose were written by the Greeks as early as the second and the third centuries. Typically, the theme of those tales was love and separation where the two lovers, after perilous adventures and hairbreadth escapes were happily united at the end. The history of the romance in Western Europe originates in the ancient Germanic military system which engendered the chivalric code at the beginning of the twelfth century. This system entailed the apprenticeship of a young warrior to an older man who exercises upon his disciple a complex pattern of rituals. A warrior was dubbed as knight and raised to the dignity of knighthood when he swore a binding oath of loyalty to his lord after he had had a ritual bath, stayed a night's vigil and pronounced a sacramental confession.

Those medieval knights, who pledged themselves to protect the weak and to right wrongs, took the responsibility of protecting the pilgrim routes to Jerusalem and to defend the Christian faith against the advances of Muslims. Yet, more significantly, the principles of chivalry facilitated important changes in attitudes regarding the value of women as Bromiley states in his Encyclopedia (1994; 272); for the first time in European history, ladies became regarded with a transcendence of premeditated thought by chivalries who conducted themselves graciously and bestowed upon ladies the utmost courtesy and attentiveness. And as highlighted by James Sweeny in The Dictionary of the Middle Ages, 1983, a chavalier was to echo shades of this attitude to all women, regardless of class, age or status.

The concept of the newly introduced knightly devotion to a lady was behind the popularization of romantic love in Western culture. The chavaliers of the Middle Ages came to gradually engage themselves in non-marital relationships with the women of nobility they served. And since marriage was commonly nothing more than a formal engagement at that time, courtly love - as reflected by the troubadours and lyrical narratives - allowed expressions of emotional closeness that had been lacking in the union between husband and wife.

Furthermore, the male-dominated clerical and military civilization of the Middle Ages suffered a drastic change by Eleanor of Aquitaine in the mid-to-late twelfth century. Eleanor, as the Queen first of Louis VII of France and then of Henry II of England, as stated by Andrew Sanders (1994; 40), exercised her patronage in favour of a new kind of courtly love which recognized a parallel between the service of a knight to his lord and the service of a lover to an adorned and honoured lady. Thus a new emphasis on the dignity and distinctiveness of women emerged. A treatise written by the chaplain of Eleanor's daughter in c.1184-6 described woman as the dominant partner in a love affair and sexual love as integral to the composition and practice of a chivalric court. Sanders commented that the shared passion of the often adulterous lovers was recognized as ennobling and semi-religious despite the precepts of the church.

So, in addition to the military responsibility undertaken by the knights of the Middle Ages, their second contribution displayed itself in the concept of courtly love which presented woman as a partner in love and also introduced the romance, spread by the troubadours, as an influential literary genre whose vernacular was not only the genesis of many European languages, but its theme was also the germ for



the birth of the novel. The word 'roman' – derived from the medieval term - is the name given for prose fiction in all European languages except English. The English took the name for the genre from Italian 'novella' which means 'new story' and they disapprovingly limited 'romance' to the original medieval works and then to emotional writings in prose fiction.

More significantly, romance had its lasting influence on the six-hundred later Romanticism. The characteristics of an itinerant bohemian troubadour, a rebellious artist and lover in exile in aesthetic worship of an idealized female figure signal "a renewal of the medieval cult of courtly love" by the nineteenth-century romantics, as Hugh Witemeyer (2005; 45) noted. To the same sense, Childs and Fowler (op.cit) pointed out that a renewed interest in "things medieval" together with a growing respect for the powers of the imagination and the intangible truth of the inner world emerged in the nineteenth century.

The Characteristics and Genesis of Romanticism:

During the nineteenth century, complicated social forms developed in Britain to the effect of the growth of rational and self-conscious theories of human thought. This matter-of-fact culture was challenged by the emergence of a medieval element in poetry and the novel. The romantics initiated a rediscovery of the truth about the way people should perceive and create. They underscored the value of the individual over the collective and therefore privileged the individual subjectivity, imagination, emotion, and spontaneity over objectivity, reason, the intellect, and order. Advocating the cult of the artist and artistic originality, the romantics identified the aim of art with the expression of the artist's emotion, and thus they countered conformation to classicists and to the agreed-

upon standards of literary production which had been strongly recommended by neoclassicists.

Like the medieval knights who attempted to reactivate the world by adoring a lady, the romantics sought a way to reactivate the world by discovering the creative perceptiveness which would allow a writer to draw aside the veils laid across the senses. They also sought a perception where the false separation of Nature (as fixed, external objects) and nature (as the living being of the perceiver) can be reconciled through a new synthesizing vision. To William Wordsworth, nature was the interface between the material and the spiritual and he believed that an accurate description of nature would allow a poet to show the spiritual significance of nature and to have confidence in the reality of himself.

This tendency to reconcile between the inner vision and the outer experience was the central distinctive feature of the romantic mode. And in order to perform this reconciliation, the romantics manipulated imagination so as to produce a vision of a life drawing upon "a sense of the continuity between man and nature and the presence of God", Childs and Fowler (ibid; 209) quoted Welleck, adding that Rene Welleck and Northrope Frye assessed Romanticism as more than an idea but essentially as "an historic centre of gravity which falls somewhere around the 1790-1830 period." This view is consolidated by A.O. Lovejoy in his famous essay 'On the Discrimination of romanticisms'. Building on the indication that the linguistic history of the word (the Romance, a romance, romance) reflects a movement from the definite to the indefinite, Lovejoy assessed that the word 'romantic' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing and has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign (1984; 228). And as a solution, Lovejoy insisted on the need for discrimination between the meanings of



the term at various times and in various countries, while Michael Ferber in the introduction of the book he edited on European Romanticism (2005; 8) suggested to keep distinct the uses of 'romantic' as a complex or system of norms and 'Romantic' as a period. Significantly, the anticipation of the former can be traced in the earlier medieval chivalry, and the persistence of the latter in later periods.

As to the genesis of Romanticism, it, curiously enough, emerged in Germany and France by the philosophers Immanuel Kant and Jean Jacques Rousseau who opposed the rationalist and materialist world view and the stultifying confines of ancient regime society that prevailed at their time. They took to expose the shortcoming of Enlightenment philosophy grounded on the tenets by Francis Bacon, John Locke and Rene Descartes.

The subject matter of Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, is to initiate a full scale conversion of the reader's sense of his or her self and its relation to the world. The book opens with the hypothesis that "experiential knowledge might quite possibly be already something composite of what we perceive by way of intuition and what is spontaneously furnished by our cognitive faculties", as Thomas Pfau cited in Ferber (ibid; 103). And in order to resolve the conflict between dogmatists (who believed that one cannot claim to know what lies beyond the drawn limit) and the skeptics (who believed in a priori knowledge independent of all experiences and which makes all experience possible), Kant made distinctions between the 'noumena' and the 'phenomena', the 'intellectual' and the 'sensible', and the 'regulative' and the 'constitutive' uses of reason. He propounds that 'phenomena' is "appearances as far as they are thought as objects according to the unity of categories" while 'noumena' is a "thing so far as

it is not an object of our sensible intuition."(2003; A249)

As for Rousseau, who also wrote novels to expand his Romantic attitude, he argued against those who distrusted emotion as misleading and believed reason alone to be reliable. Rousseau held that human beings in the state of nature were purer, freer and happier than they were in modern civilization. In his confessions, published in 1781, Rousseau famously announced; 'I am not like anyone in existence. If I am not superior, at least I am different.' He also countered Descartes' famous maxim that "I think, therefore I exist" with, "for us to exist is to feel." Rousseau maintained that emotions reveal truth; that they tell us much as the mind about how to read the inner and exterior worlds. Thus, Rousseau privileged affect over effect, imagination over idealization, the mystery of Romantic nature over the perfection of beautiful artifice. Like his follower Romantics, Rousseau – who was born a citizen of Geneva – spent periods of exile in various Swiss counties but he lived and was cultured and died in France.

After these two philosophers, the German man of letters, Friedrich Schlegel announced the birth of Romanticism in literature when he used 'romanus' as a term distinct from Latin to contrast 'classic', that is Greek and Latin literature. He recognized some contemporary writers as classical but at the same time, as he stated in his *Dialogue on Poetry* (1980; 9), he sought and found "the Romantic among the older Moderns, in Shakespeare, in Cervantes, in Italian poetry, in that age of chivalry, love and fable, from which the phenomenon and the word itself are derived." With Schlegel, the word 'romantic' came to be definitely attached, in Germany in 1798, to a kind of literature and distinguished from another kind 'classic'.

However, the date of the start of the Romantic period in England is not strictly specified; it



could be the year 1789 which witnessed the outbreak of the French Revolution and was the year when William Blake's *Songs of Innocence* came out, or the year 1798 with the *Prelude to The Lyrical Ballads* published as the manifesto of Romanticism, or even the year 1821 when Romanticism became a dominant norm with Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.

It is easy to consolidate Lovejoy's aforementioned suggestion that romanticism is a general form for a range of related ideas in poetry. First, there, in Germany, emerged three groups labeled as Romantic with no shared trait among them; the school of Joseph Wharton, the Jena circle around the Schlegel brothers, and a group of one: Chateaubriand. Second, Romantic characteristics are usually said to have been manifested first in Germany and then in England in the 1790s, and not to have become prominent in France and America until two or three decades after that time according to Abrams (2009; 255). Third, and in England, neither the exactly contemporaneous 'Lake School' (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Lamb), nor the next generation (Byron, Shelley, Keats) called themselves Romantics at the time. And William Blake went unnoticed until after his death. Fourth, the American Romantic period, as the most remarkable contribution to American literature with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, still have the names of 'American Renaissance' and 'The Age of Transcendentalism' (Abrams, *ibid*; 246).

The Influence of the romance on Romanticism:

It seems necessary to firstly highlight Childs and Fowler's contention (*ibid*; 208) that although the romance is usually associated with an avowedly "fictive" world, the medieval romance "was more directly rooted in contemporary fact than might seem apparent from our perspective", and

they conclude that it could be viewed increasingly as an imaginative and psychological projection of "the real".

On the other hand, the knights of the romance and the nineteenth-century Romantics share the traits that they both tended to represent themselves as in pursuance of a lonely quest and also that – like the production by the Romantics – most French and English romances tended to be secular in subject matter.

Another aspect of similarity between the romance knights and Romantics' attitude is concerned with the position of woman. After the knights valued woman as a partner, the Romantics went further in portraying the contradiction between society and literature through female characters; Tolstoy's Anna Karenina prefers death to being married to her fiancé and Gustave Flaubert has his eponymous protagonist Madame Bovary driven to suicide for the cause of freedom from the oppression of the marriage shackles. Furthermore, the Romantics introduced the concept of androgyny which means ambiguous or neutral sexual identity. Coleridge pointed that a genius mind is androgynous and Parsons (2007; 105) announced that androgyny signified for the Romantic imagination "a transcendence" of the physical self, and the union of rational and creative aspects of the mind in the spiritual experience of the sublime.

In the literary sphere, romances and tales dominated as the most popular publications, as well as the best literature of the most respected writers. Most of the major works of the 19th century were subtitled 'romances' or 'tales'; for one instance, Henry Fielding's *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, 1749, is constructed around a romance plot; the hero, whose true identity remains unknown until the denouement, loves the beautiful Sophia Western and at the end of the book wins her hand, numerous



obstacles have to be overcome before he achieves this. Some other titles are the Romantic Walter Scott's *The Lady of the last Minstrel* which he wrote after the ancient metrical romance, *Marion, A Tale of Flodden Field* - subtitled as 'A Romance in six Cantos'-, and Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* which was also entitled as 'A Romount'.

Another influence of the romance exhibited itself in America with the 'wilderness romance' represented by such major authors like James Fennimore Cooper and well-known works like *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* of Mark Twain. These romances project male imaginings of escape to an unspoiled natural environment in which the protagonist undergoes a test of his character and virility.

Nonetheless, the most remarkable literary heritage of the romance is the Gothic romance. In fact, it is possible to suggest that the gothic romance represents the rebellious voice of the romance being pursued by the romantics. This can be proved by the points that, firstly, it celebrated subjectivity in the face of social conventions, institutions, values and individuals threatening to overwhelm the virtuous individual. Secondly, it supported woman by presenting her as unmarried, orphaned and subjected by the evils of the paternalist, patriarchal and the courtly values and practices of the dominant classes, figured by an older male villain. Thirdly, it opposed rationality by opening up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind. Fourthly, the Gothic romance emerged in England, as asserted by Childs and Fowler (ibid; 208) as "a social and artistic reaction against limitations which the early novelists seemed to have accepted with equanimity", and it moved sexuality, elemental

passions and fear to the centre of the novelist's stage. Fifthly, and as Gary Kelly (1998; 118) sees it, the Gothic romance demystified the sublime obscurity by which, according to Enlightenment society, court culture overawes the whole of society and thereby it maintained the power of court government.

The principal aim of the Gothic novel was to evoke chilling terror and develop a brooding atmosphere of terror. It represents uncanny, macabre and melancholy violent events by means of a locale of gloomy castles, dangerous and subterranean passages and a setting of hidden laws, magic, savage nature and storms.

In an extended sense, the term 'Gothic' comprises works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, 1817, together with the elements of the macabre and terror in works such as Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, and some chapters and episodes in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Great Expectation*. America, as well, has its contribution to the Gothic in the terror tales of Edgar Allan Poe and the late William Faulkner's *Absalome! Absalome!* and *Sanctuary*.

The Rebel Knights and the Romantics:

In the early fourteenth century, an increasingly powerful monarchy, supported by new worldviews adopted by merchants and townsmen in France and England, came to suppress the chivalry. The main reason was that this system of medieval knighthood, which had inspired the creation of three European crusading Military Orders founded in c.1099, 1119, 1143, continued to exercise considerable authority throughout Western Christendom. However, and to the advantage of introducing the romance as a literary body, King Edward III of England revived the chivalry by founding the Order of the Garter in c.1344. This Order sophisticated the concept of chivalry since the hero used to take up the challenge launched to



the Arthurian court or to its values - and not to himself personally -, and his triumph became the triumph of that world behind him and supported him. In this sense, as Pedro Garcia points out (1998; 118); “he is a redeemer, a messiah, the representative of a world larger than him where he is perfectly integrated.”

The literary heritage of the romance continued to influence Western Europe till the Elizabethan period, when, during these seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Elizabethan classicists started to express their deprecation and contempt for contemporary romances in England. Though deprecated, the romance maintained its supreme rank as the literary body that challenged the epic by shifting the supernatural of the epic to this world. While the epic represented a heroic age of tribal wars with the will and actions of god being involved in the hero's acts, the standard plot of romance depicted a quest undertaken by a single knight in order to gain a lady's favour in a relationship that also contrasted the, then prevalent, Platonic love.

Likewise, the later Romantics came to challenge their predecessors, the neoclassicists of the Enlightenment, in six significant points. First, they favoured innovation over the traditionalism of neoclassic literature. Second, they believed that the poet's own feelings are what underlie poetry in contrast to the belief held by the neoclassicists that poetry was an imitation of human life that aimed to yield instruction and aesthetic pleasure. Third, while neoclassicism viewed art as a set of skills perfected by long study and practice of known and tested means, the Romantics defended that poetry is uppermost spontaneous and free of rules and conventions. Keats states, cited by Abrams (ibid; 214), that “If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree, it had better not come at all.” Fourth, neoclassic poetry was about other people, but

much Romantic poetry invites the reader to identify the protagonist with the poet himself. Fifth, and like the heroes of the romances, Romantic subjects are represented as solitary figures engaged in long quests in stark contrast to the tenet of neoclassicism that poetry was the expression of the great commonplaces of human wisdom. Sixth, human beings, who were viewed by neoclassicists as limited agents, are valued by the Romantics as endowed with limitless aspiration envisioned by the faculty of imagination, as William Blake states; “Less than everything, cannot satisfy man.” (Abrams; ibid; 215)

However, the concept of the romance together with the principles of the Romantics came to receive the blow from our twenty first-century globalization. Demising the attachment to a female, a transformation has projected homosexuality as a phenomenon enforced in our modern time by the homosexuals who are pioneering more open and negotiated relationships, as Anthony Giddens pointed in his book *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Society*.

The Decline of the Romantic Novel:

The principles set by the romantic poets are everlasting. However, the end of the Romantic period came to be announced by the demise of the romantic novel. This is no surprise relying on the fact that prose fiction, rather than poetry or drama, is the most widely used form of imaginative writing as well as the mode that addresses a broader spectrum of people. And, accordingly, prose fiction is usually reformed in relation to the unfolding political and social conflicts of a time.

Concerning the Britain of the 19th century, the Romantic novel was demised by the ad hoc political atmosphere for it to rank an uncertain position in literature in comparison with the novel of manners which dominated throughout



the preceding eighteenth century. Those novels of manner represented upper-class life for the instruction and emulation of readers lower down the social scale and depicted the manners of the dominated classes as vital interests to middle-class readers.

In the 1790s, as recounted by Gary Kelly (ibid; 204), Jacobin novelists developed the sociology of knowledge of the Enlightenment to argue that individuals and social groups are constructed by the political and cultural system under which they live. Consequently, they wrote in coalition with the dominant classes and drew on more genteel and learned and less 'democratic' literary traditions.

During the last decade of the eighteenth century, Britain witnessed class conflicts inside and military challenges abroad. Literature, consequently, was subjected to this social and political turmoil. And prose fiction, in particular, was targeted by critics, the clergy, educationalists as well as social reformers and moralists.

In 1790, the *New Lady's Magazine* launched the attack against all prose fiction in its declaration that novels "not only poison the mind from relishing well-written authors but render it less firm to resist those temptations they themselves inculcate", as reported by John Tinnon Taylor, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism* (ibid; 198), who commented that these temptations by 'relishing authors' were supposed to stem from the seventeenth-century courtly novellas and secret court histories which approximated the French libertine novels of the time.

The clergy, represented by Rev. Vicesimus Knox (op.cit.), in 1997, pronounced its attitude that, "If it is true, that the present age is more corrupt than the preceding, the great multiplication of novels probably contributes to its degeneracy." Similar attacks were also

launched by the educationalists who viewed the novel as a danger which was nurtured by children, women plebeians and primitive peoples who innately love fictitious narrative. Even the oral fiction of folktales was regarded as a vestige of superstition by social reformers and moralists who warned that if middle-class children were not carefully supervised and segregated from lower-class servants, they would be reduced by the false consciousness embodied in stories and tales.

This atmosphere made of prose fiction a sub-literary production that could only suit children and the 'primitive peoples' of the lower class. Henceforth, the novel degenerated during the nineteenth century of Romanticism and fiction became the means to sweeten the dose of instruction needed by low-class people, and to reserve the middle-class child from 'dangerous relishing authors'.

Consequently, cheap fiction prevailed and the new novelists in the literary scene became mostly women who reflected on the supposed expertise of their sex in child rearing and instruction. In fact, only two writers transcended these ephemeral productions and composed literary classics. The first was Walter Scott who employed his extensive knowledge in literature, law, history, folklore and his mastery of narrative poetry and succeeded to convert romance narratives into commendable literature. The other was the talented novelist Jane Austen who dealt with the social issues and crises of her time by portraying woman as a catalyst in the survival or decline of families in the upper and middle classes and thus in society at large.

So, except for Scott and Austen, it is possible to consider the novel as the indicator of the demise of Romanticism in Britain by the following Victorians of the twentieth century. However, the ones who launched the fiercest attack upon



the Romantics were the pioneers of Modernism as the following section delineates.

The Anti-romantic Modernists:

The three prominent pioneers of Modernism; Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot, adopted an Enlightenment attitude against Romanticism when they rejected, Beasley says, the Romantic conception of the poet as “a natural genius” in favour of the poet as “a technically skilled professional”.(2007; 116)

Ezra Pound, whose literary project allows to be described as an attempt to introduce ‘new’ art, followed a strategy to provide subversive reading of all literary heritage, and declared, as quoted by Bornstein Witemeyer (1977; 148); “If Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson had been respectable establishment figures whose influence was grown oppressive, they had to be undermined and blasted to make way for the new poetry.” And in support of twentieth-century poetry which he hoped to have as austere, direct, and free from “emotional slither”, Ezra Pound, in Beasley (ibid; 20) attacked romanticism as “a rather blurry, messy sort of a period, a rather sentimentalist mannerish sort of a period.”

T.E. Hulme, the prominent theorizer of Modernism, held the Romantics responsible for blurring “the clear outlines of human experience”, as David Simpson recounted (1993; 12). And this scathing attack upon the Romantics was grounded on Hulme’s principle that anything decent could only be got out of man by ‘tradition and organization’, consequently, Hulme’s classicist standpoint led him to reject the “‘damp’ poetry of the outmoded romantics” for a classical revival with “dry and hard poetry”. He countered the romantic belief in the infinite potential of the individual and that laws and rules inhibit and distort the individual’s innate goodness by supporting the classicist tenet that man is a

limited being who requires restraint in order to achieve anything of any value.

Furthermore, Hulme, like Eliot, adopted a religious viewpoint when he called Romanticism, Beasley (ibid; 48) recounted, “split religion” because, instead of believing in God, the “romanticist” turns man into a god. More practically, Hulme’s peer, T.S. Eliot, ended his life in the church. Yet, Eliot’s classicism is more pronounced in his literary criticism than in his poetry. In his Selected Essays, Eliot postulated that the Romantic faith in individual judgement and expression oppose the principles of criticism which presuppose the existence of agreed principles and standards. Eliot advanced further in his famous *Tradition and the Individual Talent*(1980; 21) to directly contend the Romantics by declaring that Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion and is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.

More extremely, Eliot followed the theories of the French writer and critic Charles Maurras who redefined classicism as order, reason, hierarchy, community and tradition in opposition to Romanticism which he denounced as chaos, emotion, equality, individualism and revolution. Eliot’s Maurras-based theories characterized the twentieth century as a return to the idea of classicism.

Finally, it seems appropriate to conclude that despite the deprecating views of Descartes, Locke and Bacon, and despite the cultural project of the Enlightenment, the literary propositions of the neoclassicists, the political turmoil in Britain during the nineteenth century which undermined prose fiction and despite the ambivalent voices of the modernists, the romance maintains itself as the genuine narrative of a knight in exile dreaming of his beloved, and the Romantic maintains themselves as each author whose individual pen portrays a unique



aspect of our wonderful life and contributes to literature and to the romantic everlasting quest for reconciliation between perception and art. An endeavour that Childs and Fowler trace in the Symbolists and even in the ‘Poundian’ Imagists who “forced romantic aesthetics to its logical conclusion of complete reconciliation” (ibid; 210). An eternal motivation pursued by the deconstructionists who relied on the Modernist Jacques Derrida when Paul de Man (op.cit.) argued that the historical consciousness of the Romantics “had been a powerful influence on the modern development of a historical identity.” Rather, it is an identity of now and hereafter.

This paper advocates that romanticism as a cultural and literary tendency is so broad and deep in conception – being supported by philosophers and spread in many countries and at different times – that it cannot be condensed into a “sentimentalist mannerish period”. And Ezra Pound’s disparagement was countered by the German critic Peter Burger, in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 1974, who – as Beasley summed (ibid; 119) – argued that modernism was not the break with the past it claimed to be..., but the proto-postmodernism movements of Dada and Surrealism (broke with the past), because the historical avant-garde did not simply create new styles of art...they changed the nature of art itself.

On the other hand, the Modern assaults on romanticism were launched by T.E. Hulme whose attitude led him, in his “War Notes”, in 1915-16, to perceive war as a necessity to preserve British freedom and described the pacifists as Romantics whose pacifism is based on unexamined abstractions which take no account of the facts of the current political situation. Similarly, this attitude led Ezra Pound to shift from an Imagist to a vorticist and then into a Mussolini proponent in Italy before his

seclusion to silence. And Eliot’s anti-romantic attitude took him to praise the French anarchist George Sorel as his representative of the present generation, sick with its own knowledge of history. Eliot admiringly mentioned Sorel’s demise of democracy as an ideology and not “a natural and inevitable equipment of the emancipated and instructed man.”, according to Beasley (ibid; 47). Furthermore, Eliot celebrated Maurras’s views that came to be adopted by the Vichy regime which collaborated with the Nazis during the German occupation of France (1940-1944).

With all this, it seems worthy to close with Beasley’s note, in a chapter entitled ‘Anti-Democracy’ in her book on Modernist poets, that recently critics have discovered an anti-democratic tendency in the production of the leading Modernist poets, or rather; an anti-romantic one.

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