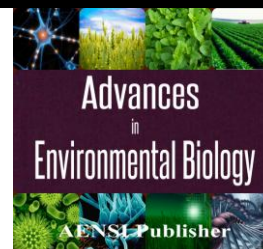




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The Opposition of Classicism to Romanticism from Madame de Staël's view

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ABSTRACT

The writers in the romantic period have praised emotions over reason and were inclined toward the pain and sadness that later predominated the romantic era. Some of them were hostile to social class differences, in search of liberty and equality while showing interest in folk culture and national origins. That is the reason why the "Middle ages" which was left aside by the classicists, became once again valuable to the eyes of the romantic writers. More a poem was simple, convivial and unrestrained more it was appealing. In order to create such kind of poetry the romantic writers started searching for new sources of inspiration that could replace the ancient Greek and Roman literature. (Seyed Hosseini, Reza (1389) Madame de Staël, French woman of letters of the 19th century, whose works greatly influenced the history of romanticism, in her book *De l'Allemagne (On Germany)*, 1810) drew a contrast between the classicism and romanticism by outlining the features of both movement while she tried to introduce romanticism in France.

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INTRODUCTION

"Romantic literature is alone capable of further improvement, because it is rooted in our own soil":

Romanticism is a revolutionary movement who follows the main political and philosophical themes of the enlightenment movement: free expression of the human sensibilities and the approval of individual rights.

Madame de Stael and her fellow countryman Chateaubriand are considered as the leaders of the romantic school. Among Madame de Stael's [6] many works (including her book on literature *De la littérature*) only one, *De l'Allemagne*, is a landmark on the way to romanticism [8].

In this work, we will try to give an answer to the following question: What are the main differences between classicism and romanticism?

Romanticism was the ideology of a new society, and the expression of a world-view of a generation, which no longer believed in absolute values, could no longer believe in any values without thinking about their relativity and historical limitation. It saw everything tied to historical supposition, because it had experienced, as part of its own destiny, the downfall of the old and the rise of the new culture [5].

Romanticism as a literary school arose between 1770 -1845. Some people believe that the factors leading to the rise of romanticism existed before 1770. As we can find many works written in the period between 1726-1767, called the pre-romanticism era, which contain the features of the romantic school. The graveyard school poetry characterized by its meditations on mortality, melancholy tone, sadness, sorrow and elicited by the presence of graveyard and ruins is an example of such works. If we consider the praising of emotion as the main feature of the romanticism, this feature has naturally existed in many periods. However, since the praise of emotion is not the only characteristic of the romanticism school and other important features of this school appeared towards the end of the 18th century, therefore its better to say that romanticism began in the late 18th century and was to flower during the 19th century [8].

The German poet Friedrich Schlegel is given credit for first using the term romantic and defining it as a literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form. He regarded romantic and Christian as the same. His brother, August Schlegel, considered romanticism as strictly opposed to classicism [8].

Romanticism was a revolt against rationalism and emphasized on the individuality of the artist, love of nature, praise of emotions and imagination. (Servat, Mansur (1382)). All the prominent themes of the Romantic

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Movement, such as individuality, idealization, creative imagination, nature, symbolic and mystic use of imagination forms, arose as reactions to the excessive rationalism [8].

There are two opposite views on romanticism: some believe that the romanticism is an escape from the real world, consequently they consider romanticism as an ill and ruination. From some others romanticism is the revival of art, the freedom and creativity of the human spirit, the deliverance from politics and rules. Romanticism has come into life due to the existing conditions of the time and has left over positive and negative impacts [7].

French romantic historiography began with *Le Génie du Christianisme* by Chateaubriand and *De l'Allemagne* (1813) by Madame de Staël, ranked as the first seminal works of the early French romanticism. In the third and fourth part of her book, Mme de Staël, gives an overview of theories of the first German romantics made on nature and its ties with human and the world [1].

De l'Allemagne:

Germaine de Staël commonly known as Madame de Staël, considered as one of the most influential persons in romanticism, was one of Napoleon's principal opponents. She spent much of her life in exile, at Coppet, in Switzerland. While in Coppet, she praised over a literature free from the strict rules of classicism that destroyed the great values of the human spirit. In contrast, Chateaubriand introduced the first spiritual and religious themes of romanticism in his book *Le Génie du Christianisme* [3].

Mme de Staël knew the Schlegel brothers and was the first person to introduce the term "romantic" in the French literature. In her book *De l'Allemagne* she made a distinction between two types of literature: that of the north she found romantic, Christian and medieval; that of the south she found classical and conventional [8].

In her book she wrote: "Germany may be considered, from its geographical situation, as the heart of Europe". [6].

In *De l'Allemagne*, Staël exalted the serious, meditative, imaginative character of German people and held it up as a model for France who was submerged in rationality, reason and evidence. Her admiration for German literature, art and spirit was so overstepped that critics describe *De l'Allemagne* as not being French. Such exaltation in presenting Germany somehow reduces the value and credit of her sayings but nevertheless, through her book she tries to encourage her fellow countrymen not to neglect the strangers and their country. It is in this book where she uses the term "romantic" for the first time [2].

She was not putting Germany forward as a model to be imitated; she wanted to encourage the rise of German consciousness among the French people to set them free of the rules and limitations of classicism, in order to reach the freedom of thought and writing. "Nothing in life ought to be stationary; and art is petrified when it refuses to change." [9].

Mme de Staël urged the French to profit from the German spirit and search for new concepts in their own history, culture and mythology. She urged them to search for new and original subjects in other countries and languages, and in the unknown world. As Mme de Staël sought support for her moral beliefs in the Kantian philosophy, she favored morality as a duty over the morality as founded upon self-interest

Mme de Staël struggle for the free expression of emotions and thought deeply influenced the French opinion and gave life to a new movement, which was later called romanticism [2].

Madame De Staël was absorbed by freedom and liberal opinions and believed that the most glorious and aesthetic literature is created in the age of liberty. The key to success is that the writer should always remain loyal to its national origins and in the path of finding new sources of inspiration in the stranger countries and cultures, shall never forget nor neglect his own history and culture. As she explains in her book, despite many problems finally managed to publish her book [6].

By analyzing the second part of this book, mainly chapter 11, we will give an overview the fundamentals of romanticism.

Mme Staël describes the poetry of the pagan world as being as simple and well defined as object of nature; on the contrary she uses the term "rainbow" to describe the romantic poetry since it is all sensation, excitement and sadness.

As she explains, the poetry of the ancients is more pure as an art; that of the moderns more readily calls forth our tears.

The classic poetry imitates the Greek and Roman but the romantic poetry takes inspiration from the Middle Ages. The literature of the ancients is a transplanted literature; that of chivalry and romance is indigenous, and natural to us (Mme de Staël uses the pronoun "we" in many occurrences to insist on indigenous literature)

Writers, who are imitators of the ancients, have subjected themselves to the rules classicism; for, not being able to consult either their own nature or their own recollections, it is necessary for them to conform to those laws by which the chefs-oeuvre of the ancients have been created. But the romantic poetry has no connection whatever with nationality and time and is free of rules.

In this chapter, she expresses that some French critics have asserted that German literature is still in its infancy; since it is transplanted, it cannot be respected and followed. But Mme de Staël considers this opinion as

entirely false by expressing that if classic poetry has for its basis the mythology of the Greeks, the romantic literature is founded on the recollection of chivalry, on the wonders of the Middle Ages. She explains that romantic literature is alone capable of further improvement, because, being rooted in our own soil, that alone can continue to grow and acquire fresh life: it expresses our religion; it recalls our history; its origin is ancient, although not of classical antiquity.

It is important to mention that when referring to classic literature Mme de Staël uses verbs of obligation to show conformity and obedience to established rules, while for romantic literature she uses arbitrary verbs to express freedom.

By opposing classicism to romanticism, Madame de Staël tries to show the might of romantic poetry.

Conclusion:

France had not improved in the field of romanticism as England and Germany did since this country was obedient to the classicism ideals, to the Greek and Roman culture [4].

At the beginning of the 19th century, change in the society forced writers to react

Romantic works are not an imitation of past models nor do they obey the established rules as the classic works did. Rather, romantic works want to show the nature in its original and untouched form [9].

Madame de Staël died unexpectedly in 1817 without having the chance to see the victory of her ideas in the world of literature. She missed the privilege to see the first romantic theaters or to read the first romantic books. [9].

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