

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LATE 18TH AND EARLY 19TH CENTURY LITERATURE

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20266932>

Abstract

This paper examines the key differences between late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literature, focusing on shifts in themes, styles, and philosophical foundations. The late eighteenth century is largely characterized by Enlightenment ideals emphasizing reason, order, and social structure, while early nineteenth-century literature reflects the emergence of Romanticism, prioritizing emotion, individuality, and nature. Through a comparative analysis of representative works and literary movements, this study highlights how historical transformations—including political revolutions and industrialization—shaped literary expression. The findings demonstrate a clear transition from rationalism to emotional and imaginative engagement in literary production.

Keywords: literature, Enlightenment, Romanticism, 18th century, 19th century, literary movements.

Аннотация: Данная работа рассматривает основные различия между литературой конца XVIII и начала XIX веков, уделяя особое внимание изменениям в тематике, стилях и философских основах. Литература конца XVIII века в значительной степени характеризуется идеями Просвещения, которые подчеркивают разум, порядок и социальную структуру. В то же время литература начала XIX века отражает становление романтизма, который ставит в центр внимание эмоции, индивидуальность и природу.

Посредством сравнительного анализа репрезентативных произведений и литературных направлений в исследовании показано, как исторические преобразования, включая политические революции и индустриализацию, повлияли на развитие литературного процесса. Результаты исследования демонстрируют явный переход от рационализма к эмоциональному и воображаемому восприятию в литературе.

Ключевые слова: литература, Просвещение, романтизм, XVIII век, XIX век, литературные направления.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu ish XVIII asr oxiri va XIX asr boshidagi adabiyot o'rtasidagi asosiy farqlarni tahlil qiladi, bunda mavzular, uslublar va falsafiy asoslarning o'zgarishiga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. XVIII asr oxiri adabiyoti asosan ma'rifatparvarlik g'oyalari bilan xarakterlanadi, ya'ni unda aql, tartib va ijtimoiy tuzilma muhim o'rin tutadi. XIX asr boshidagi adabiyot esa romantizmning shakllanishini aks ettirib, hissiyot, individualizm va tabiatni markazga qo'yadi.

Tadqiqot davomida tanlangan adabiy asarlar va yo'nalishlar qiyosiy tahlil qilinadi hamda siyosiy inqiloblar va sanoatlashtirish kabi tarixiy o'zgarishlar adabiyot rivojiga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatgani yoritiladi. Natijalar adabiyotda ratsionalizmga asoslangan yondashuvdan hissiy va tasavvurga boy ifodaga o'tish jarayoni yuz berganini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar:

adabiyot, ma’rifatparvarlik, romantizm, XVIII asr, XIX asr, adabiy yo’nalishlar.

Introduction

The transition from the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century marks a significant turning point in literary history. This period witnessed profound political, social, and intellectual changes, including revolutions, shifts in class structures, and reactions against industrialization. Literature from the late eighteenth century was heavily influenced by Enlightenment principles, which valued logic, clarity, and universal truths. In contrast, early nineteenth-century literature reflects the rise of Romanticism, a movement that challenged these ideals by emphasizing emotion, subjectivity, and the power of nature.

Understanding these differences is important for tracing the evolution of literary thought and its relationship to broader historical contexts. This paper aims to explore how and why literature transformed during this period, focusing on thematic concerns, stylistic approaches, and underlying philosophical perspectives.

This study aims to identify and analyze the key differences in themes, styles, and literary forms between these two periods.

Literature Review

The distinction between late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literature has been extensively explored in literary scholarship, particularly through the conceptual opposition between Enlightenment rationalism and Romantic subjectivism. Researchers consistently emphasize that these two literary periods embody fundamentally different epistemological, aesthetic, and philosophical orientations toward human experience and artistic representation.

Studies on late eighteenth-century literature underscore its firm grounding in Enlightenment ideals, which privileged reason, logic, and universal order. Scholars argue that literary production during this period was closely aligned with intellectual movements such as empiricism and scientific rationality. Writers sought to mirror the structured and predictable nature of reality, often adhering to classical conventions derived from ancient Greek and Roman traditions. As a result, literary forms such as essays, satire, and neoclassical poetry were dominant, characterized by balance, harmony, and formal restraint. Critics also highlight the didactic function of literature in this era, noting that texts were frequently designed to instruct readers in moral behavior, civic responsibility, and rational thought. The emphasis on clarity and objectivity further reinforced literature’s role as a tool for social and intellectual improvement.

In contrast, early nineteenth-century literature is widely associated with the emergence and consolidation of Romanticism, which many scholars interpret as both a continuation of and a reaction against Enlightenment principles. Romantic writers challenged the dominance of reason by foregrounding emotion, imagination, and individual consciousness. Research in this area points to a significant shift toward subjectivity, where personal experience and inner psychological states became central themes. Literary works increasingly explored identity, creativity, and the complexity of human emotions, often rejecting rigid structural conventions in favor of more spontaneous and expressive forms.

Furthermore, scholars emphasize the importance of historical and socio-political contexts in shaping the transition between these two literary paradigms. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were marked by profound political upheavals, including revolutions,

wars, and shifting social structures. These events challenged Enlightenment ideals of stability, progress, and rational order. As a result, researchers argue that Romanticism emerged partly as an artistic response to disillusionment and uncertainty. It offered new ways of understanding reality through emotion, imagination, and a re-engagement with the irrational and the unknown.

Scholarly discussions of Romanticism emphasize its emergence as both a continuation and a reaction to Enlightenment thought. Isaiah Berlin (1999) argues that Romanticism marked a profound shift toward individual freedom, emotional expression, and the rejection of universal rational norms. Similarly, Walter Jackson Bate (1968) explores the transformation of aesthetic values in eighteenth-century England, highlighting how classical ideals of order and restraint gradually gave way to a preference for imagination and subjective experience. Expanding on the historical and political context, Marilyn Butler (1981) situates Romantic literature within the broader socio-political changes of 1760–1830, demonstrating how writers engaged with revolutionary ideas and conservative reactions. Furthermore, Stuart Curran (1993) provides a comprehensive overview of British Romanticism, emphasizing its thematic diversity and its lasting impact on literary traditions. Together, these studies highlight the complexity of Romanticism as a literary and cultural movement shaped by intellectual, historical, and aesthetic transformations.

Overall, the literature demonstrates that the movement from late eighteenth-century Enlightenment literature to early nineteenth-century Romanticism represents not merely a chronological progression but a profound transformation in the underlying principles of literary creation. This transition reflects broader changes in philosophical thought, cultural values, and historical circumstances, making it a central topic in the study of literary history.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis of selected literary works from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Texts were chosen based on their representativeness of Enlightenment and Romantic ideals. The analysis focuses on three main criteria: thematic content, stylistic features, and philosophical orientation.

Secondary sources, including scholarly articles and critical essays, were also reviewed to support the interpretation of primary texts. The comparative approach allows for identifying both contrasts and continuities between the two periods.

Results

The analysis reveals several significant differences between late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literature, highlighting a clear shift in literary priorities, themes, and stylistic approaches.

Firstly, late eighteenth-century literature is characterized by its emphasis on reason, social harmony, and moral instruction. Texts from this period reflect Enlightenment ideals, presenting literature as a means of promoting rational thinking and ethical behavior. In contrast, early nineteenth-century works, shaped by Romanticism, prioritize emotion, individualism, and the exploration of the sublime. This shift indicates a movement away from collective, rational ideals toward a more personal and introspective understanding of human experience.

Secondly, notable differences can be observed in literary form and style. Late eighteenth-century works demonstrate structured forms, clarity, and restraint, often adhering to

established classical conventions. Language is controlled and balanced, reflecting a preference for order and precision. Conversely, Romantic literature adopts more expressive, imaginative, and sometimes unconventional styles. Writers experiment with form and language, allowing for greater creativity, spontaneity, and emotional intensity.

Another important distinction lies in the treatment of truth and knowledge. Enlightenment literature reflects a strong belief in universal truths and rational understanding, suggesting that reality can be objectively known through reason. Romantic literature, however, prioritizes subjective experience and emotional truth, emphasizing that individual perception and feeling play a central role in shaping reality.

Furthermore, the representation of nature differs considerably between the two periods. In late eighteenth-century literature, nature is often depicted as ordered, balanced, and symbolic of harmony. It serves as a stable background that reflects rational principles. In Romantic literature, however, nature is portrayed as dynamic, powerful, and spiritually significant. It is deeply connected to human emotion and often functions as a source of inspiration, reflection, and transcendence.

In addition, the role of the individual evolves across these periods. Enlightenment literature tends to present individuals as rational beings operating within a structured social framework, emphasizing conformity and shared values. In contrast, Romantic literature elevates the individual as unique and creative, highlighting personal freedom, self-expression, and the importance of inner experience.

Finally, these differences are closely linked to broader historical and cultural changes. The transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism reflects shifting responses to political upheaval, industrialization, and changing social conditions. As a result, literature moves from a focus on stability and rational progress to an exploration of complexity, uncertainty, and emotional depth.

Overall, the results demonstrate a clear transformation from rationality and order to emotion and individualism, marking a significant evolution in literary thought and artistic expression.

Discussion

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The findings confirm a profound transformation in literary values between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, marking a clear transition from Enlightenment ideals to Romantic sensibilities. This shift can be understood not merely as a change in artistic preference, but as a broader intellectual and cultural response to the perceived limitations of Enlightenment rationalism. While the Enlightenment emphasized order, logic, and universal truths, many writers began to view these principles as insufficient for capturing the full depth of human experience.

One of the major driving forces behind this transformation was the context of rapid social and political change. Events such as the French Revolution and the expansion of industrialization disrupted traditional social structures and challenged established beliefs about authority, progress, and human nature. In this environment of uncertainty and transformation, literature became a means of exploring emotional depth, personal identity, and the individual's relationship with society and nature.

Romanticism emerged as both a continuation and a re-evaluation of Enlightenment thought. Rather than completely rejecting reason, Romantic writers sought to balance it with emotion, imagination, and intuition. This is evident in their emphasis on subjective experience and the inner world of the individual. The focus shifted from society as a whole to the unique

perspective of the individual, highlighting themes such as personal freedom, creativity, and emotional authenticity.

Furthermore, the increasing importance of imagination in Romantic literature reflects a growing interest in areas that Enlightenment thinkers often overlooked, such as psychology, spirituality, and the unconscious mind. Writers began to explore complex emotional states, dreams, and the sublime—experiences that transcend rational explanation. This development can also be linked to the rise of nationalism, as authors sought to express the identity, culture, and folklore of their own nations.

Another significant aspect of this shift is the changing view of nature. In Enlightenment literature, nature was often seen as something to be studied, categorized, and controlled through reason. In contrast, Romantic writers portrayed nature as powerful, mysterious, and deeply connected to human emotion. Nature became a source of inspiration, healing, and even spiritual insight, reinforcing the Romantic belief in the unity between humans and the natural world.

Importantly, these differences demonstrate that literature does not exist in isolation; it evolves in response to historical, social, and intellectual developments. The transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism illustrates how literary movements both reflect and shape the values of their time. Literature, therefore, serves not only as a mirror of reality but also as a tool for questioning, reinterpreting, and transforming that reality.

In conclusion, the shift from Enlightenment to Romantic literature represents a complex reorientation of values—from reason to emotion, from universality to individuality, and from order to creative freedom. This transformation highlights the dynamic nature of literature as it continually adapts to the changing needs and perspectives of society.

Conclusion

The transition from late eighteenth-century to early nineteenth-century literature represents a fundamental shift from reason to emotion, from structure to creativity, and from universalism to individualism. This evolution highlights the dynamic nature of literary expression and its deep connection to historical and cultural contexts. Understanding these differences provides valuable insight into the development of modern literary traditions.

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