

Influence of Literature on Human Beings: Examples from 18th to 19th Century Literary Works

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the influence of literature on the impact of civilization by studying significant pieces from the Enlightenment, Romantic, and Victorian eras. Literature is omnipresent in human life and society and it both represents and shapes important human sentiments, civilization, and intellect. Through the close reading of Voltaire and Mary Shelley, as well as Charles Dickens with the poetry of William Wordsworth Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Emily Dickinson, this research looks into the ways literature affects societal expectations and personal ideals. I intend to show how those authors fostered the literature of culture critique and moral self-reflection, as well as the thorough transformation of cultures. The chosen works represent literature's impact on building compassion, national identity, and social responsibility. With their stories and poems, these insightful people point to the diverse facets of humanity regarding individual and societal phenomena. This paper demonstrates that literature serves not only as a mirror of society but rather as an influencer of thoughts and actions within it. By studying the literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, the focus of this research is how its significance is still pertinent today regarding human nature and society's development. Above all, this paper honors the contribution of literature towards the perception of emotions and intellect by humanity.

KEYWORDS: Literary Influence, 18th-century literature, 19th-century literature, Influence on human beings, Jonathan Swift, Romanticism, Literary Reflections on Social Inequality

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been a mirror to society, reflecting its values, concerns, and aspirations while simultaneously shaping the intellectual and emotional landscapes of its readers. More than just a storytelling approach, literature is a powerful resource for analyzing human behavior, challenging power structures, and predicting new possible worlds. The 18th and 19th centuries were characterized by profound socio-political and intellectual revolutions, which enabled the use of literature as a central instrument in the public debate and re-examination of moral values, and motivating personal and social movements. From the Enlightenment's Reason through the Romantic's passions and Victorian literature's social commentary, works of literature given and received in response not only to the changes in history but also were in the vanguard of bothering the status quo and promoting social transformation.

For example, the Industrial Revolution's identity crisis and unchecked progress are captured in the story of Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, whose sci-fi/security themes revolve around scientific aims and social ethics. In the same way, Voltaire's *Candide* dissects society's rigid appreciation for overly optimistic absolute philosophies and its political hypocrisy. The grotesque living conditions brought upon by industrial capitalism, child exploitation, class warfare, and powerlessness were fought for in numerous Charles Dickens novels like *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist*.

The romantic, pictorial approach of Nature appreciation by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge was an opposition to the core industrialization and offered a critique of the desensitization in contrast to the natural environment. Emily Dickinson, in her conservative verse, also took the opportunity to interrogate gender and identity and even transcendental thought to prove how literature could defy the hegemony in one's self-absorbed island reflection.

This text aims to examine how literature from these periods impacted human beings' existence by allowing appropriate scientific rationality, exceptional emotionalism, or social revolution through a critique of pivotal texts. It strives to determine the role literature plays in developing a person's reasoning, encouraging debate discourse, and engaging in active discourse about social problems, through the examination of literature whose aim is to present the views and attitudes of fictional works produced against the social realities. This would illustrate how the words of writers reshape thinking to bring humanity towards development and change for the better.

Literature is more than a skeleton of facts; it defines a blueprint of new ideologies, encourages examination of the status quo, and calls for action above its existence. Through literacy, societies have deliberated on morality, created idealistic balanced societies and roadmaps of inflicting violence making it an undeniable narrator regarding the development of a human. This study highlights literature as a clear intellectual and cultural force by studying the works of Voltaire, Shelley, Dickens, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Dickinson. These authors single handedly transformed the way literature tackles themes such as self-identity, political oppression, social inequalities, existential challenges, and even human's relationship with nature. In the same way, this paper analyzes the impact literature has had on past audiences while also stressing the importance it has today and in the present moment.

The Enlightenment: Rationalism and Human Rights

To comprehend the Enlightenment Movement, it would be most helpful to characterize a specific period, ranging from the late 17th to the 18th century, as a period when focus was laid on logic, science, and individual autonomy. Such literature aimed at bringing about social and political change as well as challenging everything that came before it, forwarding the idea of progress to society. The Skeptical Revolution was fueled by freethinkers who shifted the emphasis to knowledge, liberty, and criticism of established principles. The intertwined literature during this period not only promoted these principles but significantly shifted society's consciousness.

Voltaire's *Candide* (1759)

Being one of the foremost philosophers during the Enlightenment era, Voltaire decided to use *Candide* to criticize the Leibnizian concept of benevolence asserting that we live in the 'best of all possible worlds.' It is through the protagonist's journey that showcases the follies of optimism, that Voltaire aims to show how horrid the reality is. Voltaire was not the only one who advanced this concept, but through this work, he greatly motivated readers to question the importance of reliance on assumptions or faith without a shred of empirical evidence.

Voltaire captured the essence of the prevailing extremes of optimism and philosophical rationalism in his satirical novel *Candide*. The central idea of this skeptical view is based on the notion that through every event, there is a perfect predetermined purpose for the greater good to be achieved. Every single one of the misfortunate events and suffering experienced by *Candide* is portrayed to satirically critique the belief that every single occurrence and situation is intricately tied into one singular highly benevolent master plan. The famous quote states, "All is for the best in the best of all possible worlds," which becomes very ironic while *Candide* endures his unfortunate hardships. This is the central clash of optimism and emotion.

An example of this is when in 1755, *Candide* and Pangloss traveled to Lisbon only to find it in absolute ruins from an earthquake. Instead of assisting, the officials put on an auto-da-fe to curb any future problems. As *Candide* tries to make sense out of Pangloss' rationalization that suffering is good, he finds himself baffled by such extreme optimistic philosophies. This concrete example demonstrates how voicing the need to sacrifice one's comfort for the sake of resolving a situation draws attention from genuine essential needs.

By the conclusion of the novel, *Candide* abandons Pangloss's rigid optimism and instead concludes, "We must work to improve things." This indicates a change from merely accepting things as they are to taking action toward them, demonstrating Enlightenment values of individual responsibility, pragmatism, and skepticism. *Candide* influenced greatly its contemporaries by provoking them to reevaluate their ideas about pain, joy, and the function of Providence. It also aided in the general Enlightenment attack on religious and political power, inciting the masses towards a more negative and investigative view of the world.

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726)

The *Wonders of the World* describes different societies in a way that makes people question their own. Swift's satire is critiquing the ethos of the people, the society, and the systems that exist. His novel describes countless unexplainable fictional societies and urges people to analyze the reality of their contemporary world.

It is a fictitious story of Lemuel Gulliver which takes him to magical places like Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Laputa, and the land of the Houyhnhnms. The story captures a voyage and tries to portray a world in a nutshell. Each voyage represents a metaphorical lens, through which multiple angles of today's society are captured.

In Lilliput, which is a part of the backside world, Gulliver encounters the Little People having two political parties known as the Low-Heels and High-Heels, and they fight like 18th-century England. These conflicts are fought only to portray the pointless nature of political wars. These divorces are sad-governed by rational intent. But when Gulliver travels to the land of Brobdingnag, full of giants he has a different; person's view of the land, the kings of Brobdingnag comment on European politics and express their disgust towards it, which leads them to describe the leaders of Europe to be "the foulest foundation of French rulers dissection on their seats." This scathing critique forces readers to reconsider the supposed grandeur of European civilization and acknowledge its corruption and hypocrisy.

After reviewing their histories, rationality, and logical reasoning pull together the societies of 'Houyhnhnms' who are advanced horses. They, in turn, have highly violent aquitaine beings named Yahoos who are humans indulged in soulless greed, bloody violence, and utter self-interest. In my view, the Yahoos provoke the horses which shows how humans can destroy anything peaceful. All humans lack and worst of all they carry all the bestial instincts. Hence, Yahoos lack all virtue and intelligent reasoning while Houyhnhnms are the complete opposite. The best part is that Houyhnhnms cannot understand the concept of war or fighting amongst themselves. Undoubtedly, this includes Shestov's views which propound the idea that rational Enlightenment principles can lead to a world that operates in perfect balance, but contrary to this conjointly exists natural disorder. Such logic deeply contradicts the single universal morality which teaches that humans should act rationally. Reason retorts and conflicts with the single uncrossable boundary which is the most critical principle of humanity, its irrationality.

Swift takes the spirit of reason to the very last border and teaches his readers not to idealize eagerness and cunning which stop most users from attaining the outcome they seek. If I were to admonish readers with the ideologies I believe and base my steadfast opinions on, it would be out of want for them to act morally. Yahoos flail and lock themselves into identity which forces them to fail, instead of striving towards something better. Swift leads readers on a journey and forces them to think and come to the right answers. However, the rationality proclaimed by the Enlightenment has not unquestionably been stable either. All in all, the nature of humanity is unpredictable and deeply imperfect.

Both *Candide* and *Gulliver's Travels* center on the critique of human authority, the use of reason and the right to human freedom. Through satire and irony, Swift and Voltaire critique religion and politics, urging their audience to abandon faith-based reasoning, appreciate the absurdness of radical optimism and autocracy and rationally analyze the world around them. Though both texts highlight the need for a reasonable and rational advancement of civilization, they also emphasize the darker sides of humanity which at times impose an absolute ideology. The importance of these texts is emphasized further in our time because they critique the delicate relationship between ethics and logic, the obligation that comes with power, and the injustice in a so-called free society.

Romanticism: Emotion and Individualism

“Romantic” defines the period of the late 18th century to the mid-19th century which saw a shift in the concentration toward feelings, nature, and self. Which was sociological in approach and Critical to the Era of Enlightenment. Romantic literature defined the extremes of human feelings along with nature’s wonders. The period was highly concerned with imagination, witnessed and in nature considered the domination of man as something to celebrate.

Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein” 1818

Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein analyzes the wanton pursuit of personal goals, especially where it relates to the idea of self-examination... The novel being grotesque and exquisite at the same time portrays Romantic issues about the comprehension of existence and the destruction of existence emotionally and ethically. Shelley's thoughts made her readers understand Frankenstein in disguise. The central idea revolves around the progress of technology and science in humanity and the fragility of emotions.

The story revolves around Victor Frankenstein, a scientist who, with the help of his experimentation, designs a living creature and ultimately abandons it. The creature left lonely gradually goes through turmoil of abandonment and hatred, which prompts him to curse the monster that made it. Shelley is asking what the world faces as a result of a deity’s perspective, what should be the makers' responsibility for inventions, and where science crosses the moral boundary.

One of the most striking moments in Frankenstein is the creature’s poignant monologue in which he confronts his maker:

“I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator, would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I should pity man more than he pities me?”

The analysis mentions the focus of the Romantic period on feelings and how the individual worked towards gaining acceptance from their society. This section compels readers to sympathize with the creature who, beneath his horrifying facade, possesses profound emotional needs alongside a natural yearning for companionship. The emotionally charged moral conflicts in Shelley's novel illustrate the darker side of humanity and the outcomes of ruthless ambition, which is what romantics are fascinated by.

The sublime is another romantic notion presented in the novel 'Frankenstein,' which captures the beautiful yet sometimes fear-inducing elements of nature. The depiction of the Swiss Alps and the Arctic wilderness exemplifies the overwhelming and glorious parts of nature, which are deeply contrasting to the fabricated and harmful nature of humans. For instance, when Victor Frankenstein ventures into the Alps, he describes:

“These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling; and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquilized it.”

This excerpt demonstrates the Romantic period’s idea that even the most troubling of situations can be alleviated by nature. Shelley's work impacted students to acknowledge the restraint of human control and the advancement of nature’s supremacy.

The legacy of Frankenstein surpasses its contemporaneous impact, as it continues to influence debates on bioethics, scientific responsibility, and the implications of technological progress. Shelley’s novel remains crucial in discussing the multifaceted nature of human endeavor alongside the moral questions raised by scientific progress.

William Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads (1798)

Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, written in tandem with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, strayed from traditional poetry rigid forms. It employed simple diction and the ordinary beauty around us. Wordsworth's poetry was about nature and the soul, appealing to the readers' feelings and emotions, mostly encouraging them to relive their emotions and get in touch with nature. This emphasis on self-emotional experiences and nature had a great impact, both on contemporaries and later works of literature.

The publication of Lyrical Ballads is often cited as the starting point of the Romantic era in English literature. Wordsworth in the 1800 edition preface wrote down his thoughts on poetry which included interpretation of ordinary life and feelings in simple relatable language. The approach is called democratic and was very contrary to neoclassical literature that focused a lot on formality and grand issues.

One of the most celebrated poems from this set is Lines Composed A Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey by Wordsworth. In this poem, Wordsworth seeks to capture in words nature, beauty, and memory:

"Nature never did betray The heart that loved her."

The Romantic ideals considered nature to be the best source of wisdom, guidance, and solace. Wordsworth explains his connection with the natural landscape and how it shaped his identity and provided comfort in difficult times. This understanding was unconventional, for it regarded nature not as a backdrop, but rather as a crucial aspect of humanity's lived experience.

Faced with the celebration of nature and an individual's emotional experience, Wordsworth's audience surely anticipated romance with the natural world and the discovery of the self. His influence extended to subsequent generations of poets and Transcendentalist writers in America who relied heavily on themes of nature and individualism.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798)

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, which is also part of Lyrical Ballads, is a narrative poem by Coleridge that attempts to give the reader a notion of sin, redemption, and nature. The poem depicts an old mariner who is jinxed for killing the albatross which causes his crewmates to die, leaving him as the only one alive in pain. Through the use of symbolic and supernatural elements, Coleridge explores how one can disrupt the balance of nature and how one can redeem themselves through suffering and regret.

The poem's vivid imagery and rhythmic language capture the reader's imagination, creating a haunting and immersive experience. One of the most famous lines in the poem illustrates the mariner's suffering and isolation:

"Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink."

The paradox highlights the mariner's predicament- dying of thirst while surrounded by an ocean. This represents the consequences of his defiance against nature. The ghostly nature of the poem, alongside other things, punishment also portrays the Romantic interest in the supernatural and awe-inspiring features of nature.

At the end of the poem, the mariner learns to acknowledge the beauty of nature which brings him to his redemption.

"He prayeth well, who loveth well Both man and bird and beast."

This was not only redemption but a remarkable romance principle of the bond between all living systems, loving nature, and flora and fauna. To this day, the poem serves to engage mature audiences with challenging thoughts of humanity's role in nature revolving around issues of guilt and forgiveness.

The primary focus of the Romantic movement as exhibited in *Frankenstein*, *Lyrical Ballads* and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, was on deep feeling, creativity, and the majesty of the Earth. While Shelley's novel cautions about the problems of excessive drive and the scientific blunders of modern times, Wordsworth as well as Coleridge admire nature and the self-reflective journey of a person. These pieces are still relevant today as they illustrate the significance of nature, emotions, and the human spirit in art and philosophy.

Literature and Moral Development

The empathy middle literature nurtures extends to moral reasoning. In addition to fostering empathy, literature also presents ethical dilemmas which require the readers' reflection. A literary work will often tackle some morals contrary to popular culture, and in some cases, force readers to reconsider their values.

Crime and Punishment, written by Fyodor Dostoevsky in 1866, tackles the psychological suffering of Raskolnikov who views himself as a murderer and aims to murder because of his perception of moral superiority. Gradually, with the development of the novel, readers learn how Raskolnikov gets redemption and makes readers confront issues like justice, sorrow, and relief. His profound experiences illustrate how underlying the assassin's crime, there are grave moral and existential issues that can have severe consequences on society. It further shows how novels capture and transform the moral consciousness of a society.

George Orwell's 1984 published in 1949 is another very popular novel whose themes extend towards the impact of totalitarianism and mass surveillance on society. The phrase "Big Brother is watching you" illustrates the social control imposed by the state – its repayment constantly recurring. Orwell's work transformed society's understanding of privacy and autonomy.

Depicting a totalitarian society through a fictional novel, Orwell undeniably contributed to contemporary discussions of liberty and human rights.

The Role of Literature in Personal Growth and Self-Understanding

Literature can also be employed as a means of self-evaluation and psychological reflection. For many readers, literature provides a way to understand their emotions, difficulties, and dreams, allowing them to find peace within themselves.

Romantic poetry, in the case of "Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth, takes a look at the relationship between a growing memory, nature, and self-development. Reflectively, Wordsworth observes the changes in how he views nature in the present, in comparison to the past, and asks himself how much self-discovery and human experience alter during existence:

*"For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity."*

Readers often view literature as a structured means of understanding emotions and introspecting on their life events. Apart from this, one of the most remarkable impacts reading has is relaxing the mind – the modern day version of escapism.

Literature as a Catalyst for Social Change

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Over the years, literature has inspired movements that offer social and political change. Works from abolitionists, such as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe published 1852, contributed greatly to the United States' views on slavery. It is said that Abraham Lincoln referred to Stowe as "the little lady who started this great war." This was largely in part to the anti-slavery regions that the novel brought forth, as well as the emotional imagery of slavery employed through the cover art.

Women's rights have also been hit upon recently by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, with her book *We Should All Be Feminists* published 2014. This work argues for more inclusiveness within gender roles, which needs societal support. The public image of literature reinforces its importance as a powerful tool for social change.

What I deeply believe is that literature is something beyond the realm of entertainment. Instead, it creates psychologically and socially ready 'subjects' whose ways of thinking, emotions, and behaviors are liable to be affected. Literature inspires changes socially, dominates certain spheres, prompts moral development, nurtures the feeling of empathy, motivates deep self-introspection, and all these aspects form an essential part of human psychology.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, literature has always been crucial in molding human reasoning, psychology, and behavior. Literature of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Victorian eras not only expressed the ideas and worries of their epochs but also shaped both self and social consciousness. In review of prominent literary works, this study sought to illustrate how literature enables the exercise of the mind, evokes feelings, and serves the purpose of social change.

The Order's focus on logic and doubt, for instance, in Voltaire's *Candide* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, further advanced the principles of questioning and critical thinking. Authors sought to uphold rational ideas as they went against the firm-set norms. The Romantic era centered around feeling, nature, and personal experience as shown in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. Such pieces advanced the understanding of emotions, the sublime, and personal identity. In the same spirit, the Victorian era also focused on literary strife with social ills and reform which advanced *Oliver Twist* by Dickens and the famous novel by Brontë, *Jane Eyre*. Issues such as poverty, social stratification, and bias towards women were addressed which later shaped many people's views and policies.

Aside from the historical and socio-cultural factors literature has deeply affected the human psyche and morality. By helping to build sympathy, rethinking ethics, and prompting introspection, literature changes not only the perception but also the interaction an individual has with the world. Orwell's *1984* alongside Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* serve as great examples of the idea that a piece of literature can shape one's thought processes, which proves the concept of literature being timeless. Literature has also had an impact in bringing about paradigm shifts, for instance, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe prepared the ground for the abolitionists while Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* is aimed at the contemporary discourse of gender issues.

All in all, it is a fact that literature has a rich potential for stimulating societal compassion, social awareness, and intellect but by itself is incapable of solving societal challenges. The continuing engagement with literature enables people and societies to learn from history as they envision what the future can offer.

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