

Internalization of Paradise

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Abstract

Highly sensitive and quite aware of the corruption of the world, many romantic thinkers and writers, however, did not lose their hope for regaining what human beings had lost by the Fall in religious terms or by leaving "the state of nature" behind and making social contracts to live in "the state of civil society" in Rousseau's words. Romantics' deep disillusionment with the French Revolution made them come to the conclusion that no actual Utopias would be constructed in a corrupted world, thus they became set on making some spiritual Utopias within themselves. In doing so they created their redemption myths which were somehow molded under the influence of Platonic notions and also, in the case of English romantics, the myth Milton had created in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Those myths, however, did not embrace all human beings. Rousseau's "solitary walker," Blake's "Albion," Novalis's *Ofterdingen* and Wordsworth's "philosophic mind" are particular, exceptional humans among the whole human race who can gain a spiritual "holy grail" in their quest for self-fulfillment: they find it in their own soul, thereby attaining peace of mind after a life-long search. Hence the internalization of the paradise lost by Adam and Eve.

Key Words: incomprehensible, interior journey, intuition, intuitive understand-ing, inwardness, self-development, self-realization, Utopia.

Introduction

Since Socrates to Foucault, the history of thought has been imbued with the attempts of different thinkers and philosophers to reach to Truth, answer human's essential questions about the complexities of universe, and find the ways through which human beings could solve the problems of their life as social beings and also the problems inherent in their nature, and thereby gaining peace of mind. These matters sound to be inseparable and intertwined with each other; seeking Truth has mostly been mingled with the effort to solve man's problems and closely attached to the endeavor to attain peace of mind. In regard to the given answers and suggested ways, one might cautiously classify different thinkers in two broad groups: idealistic thinkers and materialistic ones, though each group presents a noteworthy diversity of ideas.

Romantic thinkers and writers might be included in the first group, though some of them, such as Byron, were atheist, or in the career of some others, such as Shelley, in the early parts, traces of atheism have been observed. Most of them, however, were idealists, even Shelly in the last years of his lamentably short life was a firm Platonist. Declaring his own idealistic cast of mind, Coleridge once stated, "in philosophy all men must be either Aristotelians or Platonists" (Bewley,1970,736), and by saying so he meant that he himself and most of romantic thinkers were Platonists. They could not approve of the rationalistic, empirical philosophies of Descartes, Hume and Locke that seemed confined and confining to them. They made significant efforts to set their minds free from the prison of Socratic Cave, the world of matter wherein all of us, imperfect copies of perfect Ideas, are imprisoned. In so doing they should have gone beyond the boundaries of the confined logic because they looked for Truth in the realm that is "incomprehensible" to the narrow-scope reason; the shining Sun is out of the Cave, and the empirical theories of the philosophers of the seventeenth and

the eighteenth centuries were unable to help the prisoners of the Cave release themselves and see the real things instead of the shadows. Therefore those philosophies should have been defied and that was exactly done by thinkers such as Coleridge whose "aim was to show the necessity of replacing the mechanical interpretation of life and nature ... by one consistently spiritual" (Ward and Waller,1966,136). The rejection of "the mechanical interpretation of life" and "replacing" it with a "spiritual" one is at the core of Romanticism: the rejection of the accepted notions of the Age of Reason.

Defiance of Clichés

In most idealistic thinkers, philosophic and moral idealism are entwined, likewise is with the romantics. Emerson begins *The Conduct of Life* with an essential question: "How shall I live?" and attempts to answer it in the nine chapters of the book. That was not the first or the last time in the history of thought that such a matter was propounded, nevertheless what distinguishes his answer from that of Benjamin Franklin's is his different ethics. If the proper conduct to Pope, either in life or art, was to accommodate to decorum, "for Shelley at Oxford, wearing long hair was a symbolic act ... in contradistinction to the close-clipped hair-cuts" (Crook and Guiton,1986,131). Romantics pursued their own way of life, not the way society imposed on them because, as Rousseau believes, "What is most soul-destroying ... about the state of civil society is that men learn to live in the opinion of others, forced to value themselves by social standards" (Cantor,1984,10). These "social standards" are what the romantics stood against because they are "soul-destroying" and the adaptation of them would result in what Gertrude Steine has considered as a process in which one forgets that s/he is an "entity" and acquires an "identity" given by others to her/him. Romantics resisted such a "soul-destroying" thing by their attempts to awaken the deeply slept soul of people. According to Sir Herbert Read,

"what took place through the agency of Coleridge and Wordsworth was no mere change in literary fashion, but a widening of human consciousness" (Raine, 1971, 27). They motivated their readers to look in a new way at world, doubt the long-accepted ideas, and be alert to whatever was offered to them as Truth. Their movement was a clean sweep of clichés, and they were the pilgrims of the "untrodden ways" through which they sought "strange truths in undiscovered lands," as the poet in Shelley's *Alastor* dose (Lockridge, 1989, 309).

Inwardness and Intuition

The attempt to discover "strange truths" gave form to the revival of Platonic contemplation about the "infinite ... unknown ideal – complete being, final truth" in Romanticism (Perkins, 1967,20). Attention must be paid to the fact that all the words in the quoted phrase are Platonic ones: infinite, unknown ideal, complete being and final truth. When the object of meditation is the "unknown ideal," the thoughtful person can not obey the rules of reason in thinking about it, or seek it in the world of matter; s/he should go beyond that world or in other words, s/he must make an effort to enter the realm of spiritual, non-material beings. The best chariot to carry her/him to that realm is her/his own soul.

Inwardness is one of the inherent features of Romanticism; the world the romantic thinker finds within herself/himself is more interesting than the outside world; the scent of the "blue flower" within pleases her/him more than the smell of the flowers without. In *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by the great Goethe, the "larger reality for Werther is internal: 'I look within myself and find a world'" (Gearey, 1985,7). All the meanings the romantics searched for could be found in their own soul because "all moral process emanates from and returns to the mental theatre of the individual," as Blake believes. The "mental theatre" of human beings attains such a remarkable

significance in Romanticism that to Rousseau, "contemplation is a mode of action," and to Coleridge, "the consideration of existence" is "the mere act of existing," as he states in *The Friend*:

Hast thou ever raised thy mind to the consideration of existence, in and by itself, as the mere act of existing? Hast thou ever said to thyself thoughtfully, It is! heedless in that moment whether it were a man before thee, or a flower If thou hast indeed attained to this, thou wilt have felt the presence of a mystery, which must have fixed thy spirit in awe and wonder ...

Not to be, then, is impossible: to be, incomprehensible. If thou hast mastered this intuition of absolute existence, thou wilt have learned likewise, that it was this, and no other, which in the earlier ages seized the nobler minds, the elect among men, with a sort of sacred horror ... (Raine, 1971,27)

"Intuition," then, is to feel the "presence of a mystery" that fixes the "spirit in awe and wonder," in "a sort of sacred horror," due to the intuitive understanding of the "incomprehensible"– the complexity of being that cannot be comprehended by the confined apprehension of Hume's "senses"; it is only attained by the revelations of an indefinable power that enables the reflective "elect" to "achieve power over circumstances by an intuition of its own radiating centrality" (Lockridge,1989,292). That achievement is the sought-after of the romantics – the conditions arrived at only through inwardness, when the meditative human "has mastered" the "intuition of absolute existence." Afterward s/he is a transformed being, an "elect" whose efforts have resulted in gaining a "radiant" vision that helps her/him to discover "the glory" that has ever existed "unchanged within," as is depicted by shelly in *Prometheus Unbound*:

his pale, wound-worn limbs
Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night
Grew radiant with the glory of that form

Which lives unchanged within. (II, i, 62-65)

The fall of the "wound-worm limbs" symbolizes the tormenting but magnificent transformation that is not attained easily. Shelley and other romantics by "highlighting" that notion "established a distinctive mode of capturing the [Platonic] real The world could not be remade [, they believed,] without visionary freedom" (Alexander,1989,5). The vision of "the glory" that "lives unchanged within" is the result of looking inward and "designate[s an internal] power [that makes one] able to commune with transcendent reality Thus only through the imagination can we apprehend reality in its organic wholeness and process" (Perkins,1967,18). Therefore those who master the "intuition of absolute existence," would apprehend the "incomprehensible," and when such a state is arrived at, the master's mind, in Emerson's words, would be "illuminated ... his heart is kind, he throws himself joyfully into the sublime order, and dose, with knowledge, what the stones do by structure," hence the union of human and nature, and it is just then that "God builds his temple in the heart on the ruins of churches" (Miles,1974,4-5). This is the peak of self-fulfillment gained by the awakening of human's divine but slept soul.

Spiritual Quest

A great deal of romantic literature presents an endless, eternal quest for self-realization and self-fulfillment – a quest for the "blue flower," the symbol of German Romanticism. Wordsworth's *The Prelude* is a remarkable example of "a central literary form of English, as of European Romanticism – a long work about the formation of the self, often centering on a crisis, and presented in the radical metaphor of an interior journey in quest of one's true identity and destined spiritual home" (Talbot et al.,1989,7). Two Key terms of romantic literature are referred to here: "interior journey" and "the formation of the self" that are also observed in "Blake's *Milton*, Keats's

Endymion and *Fall of Hyperion*, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, [and] Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*" (Talbot et al.,1989,7) and many other works of German, French and American Romanticism.

The journey, whether it appears as an "interior" or an actual one, is essentially a spiritual one that in any case is the main way through which the authentic self is formed. The romantic "quester" might be like Blake's "man of spirit, a 'mental traveler,' who in walking through the world of experience or laboring at his creative work develops 'intellect,' thus discover[s] true wisdom," (Beer,1980,291) or might appear as "the ego" of Whitman's poetry, "a traveler and explorer ... [whose] object is 'to know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls'" (Fiedelson,1960,17). In either case, he is an "explorer" whose sought-after is "true wisdom" in search of which he must tread the "roads for traveling souls," to develop "intellect" in order to reach to Truth.

Self-development is the major theme of the most remarkable kind of German romantic novel, Bildungsroman, whose outstanding paradigm is Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* that "reflects development, as in the designation drawn from the guild system – 'apprenticeship' for the first part, 'travels' for the second, and the implied and eventual 'master'. The hero would grow into his own name, Meister" (Gearey,1985,16). Meister, however, is not the sole pioneer of self-developing characters; Novalis's Ofterdingen, the hero of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is another one in whose dream a blue flower appears as a "vague plant" and "remains [as his] elusive goal" (Neubauer,1985,225-26). Ofterdingen "roams the world searching for the meaning of nature and its laws" – a wandering that seems endless, and the "blue flower" functions in the narrative as an emblem of the ultimate truth or the sought ideal, "a sort of symbol of symbols, representing the most secret meaning of the poet's art" (Brumm, 1985,375-76) that could "gain life only as an embodiment of Heinrich's imaginative yearning" (Neubauer,1985,225),

hence the importance of imagination and inwardness in Romanticism. What the romantic hero seeks is to be finally found within himself, in the depth of his own soul – the remnant of the world of Ideas.

Internalization of Paradise

The most noteworthy aspect of the romantic spiritual quest is the ultimate discovery that the sought "holy grail" exists in one's own soul, as Bloom and Trilling have pointed out: "The major romantic questers ... are all engaged in the extraordinary enterprise of seeking to re-beget their own selves" (4). Romantic hero "roams the world" symbolically to gain what he possessed all the time, but had neglected or had not been aware of. In order to form the authentic self, or in other words to "re-beget" the self, he ought to cherish that neglected or unknown potentiality, and this is the main stone of Bildungsroman. In *Wilhelm Meister*, "what the hero seeks is ... to realize the potential of his own nature" (Gearey,1985,16), and it has been stated about *Lucinde*, Schlegel's sole novel, that "Salvation in this post-Christian Bible is the self-fulfillment that comes from self-awareness" (Perl,1985,191). Referring to religious terms in this quotation is quite related to the subject of the present essay: human's search for her/his unknown potentiality is the only way to achieve "self-fulfillment" – a sought- after as old as the Original Sin. What the fallen Adam and Eve sought was to regain the peace of mind they enjoyed in the lost paradise – the quest artistically dramatized by Milton in his splendid, immortal epic, and revived by the romantic poets who were greatly under the influence of that "well-wrought" work. In his scholarly book, *Creature and Creator*, Paul Cantor has presented an interesting view about the impact of Milton and his myth depicted in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise regained* on English romantic poets in making their own redemption myths:

Milton's myth involves three stages, which in altered form provide the

framework for romantic creation myths: paradise, paradise lost, and paradise regained The original stage in Milton is ... portrayed as a state of perfect harmony for man, both internally and externally. Man is at peace with himself... In particular, his reason and his passions do not act at cross purposes Correspondingly... social harmony prevails Finally, man is in harmony with the world around ...

But this paradise is destroyed by the fall. As a result of man's willful disobedience ... he undergoes a painful self-division. His passions for the first time get out of control Simultaneously his peaceful society falls apart Similarly, man's unity with his environment breaks down. Nature turns hostile The effect of these changes is to introduce suffering into human existence, compounded by the fact that man for the first time has to worry about his mortality ...

At first the fall seems to be a total and unmitigated disaster. But in one respect, it makes a step forward for man ... the fall, though it introduces misery into human life, also introduces an element of human independence Moreover, as it's origin in eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil shows, the fall dose involve a gain in awareness of man ...

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Milton's faith in divine providence requires a third stage Man will be able to cancel out the negative aspects of both the original paradise and the fallen world, while preserving what was positive, and thus achieve a perfect synthesis. Eliminating his initial ignorance and his acquired corruption, man will become both happy and wise As Michael promises Adam: "Then wilt thou not be loath / To leave this Paradise, but shall possess / A paradise within thee, happier far." (XII. 585-87)...

From the standpoint of Romantic myth-makers, the most interesting

aspect of this third stage in Milton is the internalization of paradise. (1-3)

On the basis of Milton's myth, English romantic poets molded their own myths that, in spite of their differences, had the brand of the *Paradise Lost* on their foreheads. The "internalization of paradise" became one of the most significant notions in the canon of romantics when their hopes in the French Revolution came to nothing and they got disillusioned with making an earthly Utopia. That no Utopias would be possible to be constructed on the earth made them attempt to build their own Utopias within themselves.

In his *Second Discourse*, Rousseau propounds two stages in the history of humankind. The first stage, that resembles Milton's paradise, is "the state of nature" which is the "state of perfect harmony" wherein man lives in peace with himself and his environment. The second stage, reminiscent of the lost paradise, is "the state of civil society" in which the harmony between man's passions and reason, and the harmony between human and nature are terminated. Rousseau, according to Cantor, "does not present a third stage" because he believes that the majority of human beings cannot regain the lost paradise (7).

Among the myths the English romantics have created, those of Blake's and Wordsworth's are of the prime importance. Their myths strongly resemble each other, nevertheless there are distinctive differences between them. Both poets believe that man's "original state," i.e. his childhood, is the state of "harmony" and "innocence," and the next state, that of "experience" does not only "introduce suffering into human existence," but also corrupts humans. There is, however, a difference between their myths that lies in their distinct ideas about child's knowledge and also about the regained paradise. Blake's "fully realized human being, Albion" "emanates" from the synthesis of the original innocence and the later experience; Albion represents a loftier innocence because his fall from the paradise of childhood into the corrupted world of experience "does involve a gain in awareness," exactly like Adam

in Milton's myth, and his ultimate, lofty innocence is the result of "Eliminating his initial ignorance and his acquired corruption", again like Adam. But to Wordsworth the first phase of man's progress is not a state of "ignorance" because, under the influence of Plato's ideas, he believes that child knows intuitively the ultimate truth because his soul has come from the world of Ideas (hence considering child as "the father of man") and then by growing up and entering the world of corruption, "the state of civil society," he loses the sight of Truth. What his "philosophic mind" achieves after a life-long suffering and contemplation is the regained wisdom of childhood.

It seems necessary to point out that although Blake and Wordsworth propound a third stage in their myths, while Rousseau apparently does not do so, as Cantor states, what they present as the regained paradise is exactly the same as what Rousseau considers for his "solitary walker," not for the majority of people. Wordsworth's "philosophic mind" and Blake's Albion are as peculiar and eccentric as Rousseau's "solitary walker"; their third stage does not embrace the whole human race. The restoration of "health and beauty" is only possible for "the nobler minds, the elect among men," as Coleridge calls them, who in addition to "the corporal eye," in Blake's words, possess "the intellectual eye" that "belongs to the energetic human being who is a mental traveler" (Beer, 1980,291). The redemption, however, is achieved only after a life-long torment in the dark, gloomy Socratic cave.

Conclusion

The "magic act of romantic creation myths," as is revealed in Blake's *The Book of Urizen*, is the representation of "the most optimistic view of man's future," which is nonetheless "grounded in the most pessimistic view of his present" (Cantor,1984,55). The same paradoxical view is observed in Shelly who persists on "his vision of a world purged of corruption and restored to health and beauty" (Crook and Guiton, 1986,6), while the depicted figures of

his poetry mostly "fall upon the thorns of life" and "bleed." The very hope for gaining the paradise within even for those few "elect" reveals the inherent, though paradoxical, optimism of romantic thinkers that has its roots in their idealistic philosophy; they were Plato's disciples. In spite of their awareness of the corruption of the world of matter, the Socratic prison, they did not lose their hope for ascending Plato's metaphorical ladder at the top of which they could behold the union of Beauty and Truth, and declare "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

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