



Three Pessimists.

The three are victims of the romantic illusion, and they are especially victims because ~~neither~~ none of them had the romantic temperament. All three were destined to be classicists, and, in their manner of writing, Leopardi always was, Vigny almost always, Quental only so in the perfect cast of his sonnets. The sonnet is non-classical, however, though, owing to its epigrammatic basis, it should be so.

All three were thinkers, Quental most of all, for he had real metaphysical ability, Leopardi afterwards, Vigny last, but still far ahead in that respect of the other French romantics, with whom, naturally, he should be compared in that respect.

The romantic illusion consists in taking literally the Greek philosopher's phrase that man is the measure of all things, or sentimentally the basic affirmation of the critical philosophy, that all ~~the~~ the world is a concept of ours. These affirmations, harmless to the mind in themselves, are particularly dangerous, and often absurd, when they become dispositions of temperament and not merely concepts of the mind.

The romantic refers everything to himself and is incapable of thinking objectively. What happens to him happens to the universality of things. If he is sad, the world, not only seems but is, wrong.

Suppose a romantic falls in love with a girl of a higher social station, and that this difference in class prevents their marriage, or, perhaps, even ~~their~~ love on her side, for social conventions go deep into the soul, as reformers often ignore. The romantic will say, "I cannot have the girl I love because of social conventions; therefore social conventions are bad". The realist, or classicist, would have said, "Fate has been unkind to me in making me fall in love with a girl I cannot have", or "I have been imprudent in cultivating an impossible love". His love would not be less; his reason would be more. It would never occur to a realist to attack social conventions on the score that they produce such results for him, or individual troubles of any kind. He knows that laws are good or bad generally, that no law can fit every particular case come under it, that the best law will produce terrible injustices in particular cases. But he does not conclude that there should be no law; he concludes only that the people involved in those particular cases have been unlucky.

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