



fully sentient being on par with chemist Priestley

(Barbauld l. 1). By appealing

-

unites arguments rooted in emotion, ethics and reason (Barbauld ll. 3, 27, 25). Barbauld's poem, while whimsical in meter and perspective, is both a serious commentary on human responsibility and a reminder that Romantic writers were not always opposed to the ideas flourishing during the movement that came to be known as the Enlightenment.

One legacy of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century was the rationalistic functioning as harmoniously as a watch (Fairchild 3). During the

could not be quantified by the tools of science, but only appreciated in tranquility. While the mechanistic worldview implied the existence of a detached Creator, the Romantics more closely resembled pantheism. Their portrayal of nature as a spiritual nurturer suggests that,

This revised conceptualization of nature fostered a second important aspect of the
the conviction that poetry leads to higher truths. These truths,
as Eichner puts it, were not like objective mathematical formulas waiting to be discovered;
Romantics

expression o

Although Romantic artists and contemporary scientists disagreed over the methods of and reasons for looking at nature, Fairchild argues, their goal was the same to locate

(121).

Central to Romantic art is preoccupation with individual, subjective experience, a source

express feelings

both anticipated Romanticism and resurfaced in its works (42). His essential argument that developments of the past defy neat labels bestowed in hindsight is basic historiography. The

says, was intensely aware of what came before it, and Enlightenment principles, such as about tolerance, persisted in its works (Brown 27).

While prominent Enlightenment thinkers generally maintained an encouraging, optimistic attitude toward technological advancement, however, Romantic writers frequently highlighted the dark side of progress. Innovations contributed to the desecration of nature, the weakening of morals, and the demise of spirituality (Hugo and Spacks 285, 287).

Barbauld's Petition to Dr. Priestley

Barbauld was not intended as a wholesale attack on scientific inquiry. Rather, it is a masterful examination of two powerful drives: the human instinct for knowledge, and his ethical obligations toward nature, which may be summarized as acknowledging the vulnerability of all life. The vulnerability of

Priestley, has resonated with generations of readers, leading some to conclude that the mouse symbolizes oppressed humans, perhaps women or slaves (Bellanca 48). On the most basic level, however, the poem is a plea for mercy from a future experimental subject (Barbauld l. 1)

argument also emphasizes rational thinking ability

Dr. Priestley. In fact, the argument made in roughly half of the poem is based on logic. As the mouse emphasizes the commonality of all living beings, it is effectively weaving an argument based on universality and natural rights, concepts cherished by Enlightenment thinkers.

initial appeal in the poem is to emotion. The first word, the exclamation
a sense of spontaneous distress (Barbauld l. 1). Speaking in the third person, the

captive

jail room (Barbauld

wives betraye

represent an intellectual victory for Priestley (Barbauld ll. 15, 16). The Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment encouraged a view of nature as a realm to be dominated for material and

. This belief is perhaps

Aenid,

(Longman Anthology 66 fn.).

emotion and reason are not incompatible. Barbauld even suggests that scientific training

heightens sensitivity to ethical considerations, -taught philosophic mind / To

argument, an argument based on the kinship of all living things. The mouse stresses this theme in

Extending the argument of commonality, the mouse has as unalienable a right to liberty as a

an

By

focusing on the high cost of knowledge, the poem serves both to underscore the need for ethics

Works Cited