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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF NATURE IN ROMANTIC POETRY

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Abstract

Love for nature is one of the perennial characteristics perceived in Romantic poetry. English Romantic poets employ nature as an influential theme in their poetry; however their treatment of nature does not sound to be similar. This article aims at differentiating English Romantic poets' preferential treatment of nature succinctly by including ten poems of five noted English Romantic poets, namely Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats. This article concludes that nature for Wordsworth is a sort of God or Goddess; for Coleridge it is an expression of the mystical power; for Byron it is a reflection of mankind; for Shelley it is a healing power; and for Keats it is a source of sensuousness inflaming sensual pleasures.

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Introduction:-

Poetry, a genus of literature, momentarily embraces emotions, imagination, musicality and implicit expressions. It is an exposition of life through imagination and feelings (Hudson, 2002). Romantic poetry is the poetry characterized by love for nature, imagination, melancholy, escapism, Medievalism, supernaturalism, subjectivity and Hellenism. Romantic poets were those poets who followed Romanticism, a movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that marked the reaction in literature, philosophy, art, religion and politics from Neoclassicism and formal orthodoxy of the preceding period (Harmon, 2009). They revolted against the poetic tradition of the eighteenth century and ostracized the set rules and orders of the neo-classical poets and provided too much emphasis on emotion, imagination, originality and freedom in their poetry written in normally used ordinary language. English Romanticism can be taken as both a revolt and a revival. The best acknowledged English Romantic poets are Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is a British Romantic poet from Grasmere, Lake District (Parrish, 2021). He condensed man's mystic relationship with nature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) is an English Romantic poet, literary critic and philosopher. He is a main figure in the Romantic Movement of the early Nineteenth Century (Beer, 2021). George Gordon Byron (January 22, 1788- April 19, 1824) is a British Romantic poet and satirist whose poetry and personality holds the imagination of Europe. He is renowned as the gloomy egoist (Marchand, 2021). Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 – 8 July 1822) is one of the major English Romantic poets (Reiman, 2021). John Keats (1795 – 1821) is a leading English Romantic lyric poet (Hough, 2021). This article analyzes how these Romantic poets treat nature.

2. Nature in Romantic Poetry

Treatment is the way in which someone behaves towards or deals with someone or something (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). Preferential treatment denotes a special treatment. Nature is the occurrences of the physical world mutually,

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including plants, animals, and the landscape, and other features and yields of the earth (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). Nature in poets ignites imagination that draws on our understandings and information of the world around us and joins them with the entirely unacquainted entities to make somewhat new (Lavelle, 2014). Romantic poets commonly treat nature as a source of pleasure and poetic creation despite their other alterations in their understanding of nature.

2.1 Nature in Wordsworth's Poetry

Wordsworth, a priest of nature, interprets beauty in spiritual terms. He makes a spiritual interpretation of nature. He perceives God in Nature, and Nature in God.

He reveals his great love and honor for nature. He desires to spend his remaining life by being close to nature. Nature for him is a divine spirit capable of inspiring and delighting the human beings. The following verse lines suggest his will to worship nature to make his life meaningful and blithe:

And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety. (My Heart Leaps Up when I Behold: lines 8-9)

The poet considers nature as a living being or spirit with the capability of teaching human beings. He, arguing with his friend, asserts that one portion of spring wood may teach us more about man and morality than all the sages can. It means the books written by wise men can't teach us as much as nature does:

One impulse from a vernal wood/ May teach you more of man,/ Of moral evil and of good,/ Than all the sages can. (The Tables Turned: lines 21-24)

2.2 Nature in Coleridge's Poetry

Coleridge assumes that nature is an expression of the divine power, but it isn't God itself. It is extraordinary and mysterious, and through his mind or imagination he turned those mysteries into ordinary, relatable subjects. It is difficult to understand because its various phenomena are not crystal clear and we cannot explain everything with the help of rationality.

Coleridge is a brilliant craftsman for blending the natural and supernatural entities. His description of the place, waning moon, and a woman waiting for a demon-lover is really magnificent:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover! (Kubla Khan, lines 14-16)

Geraldine, an utterly beautiful girl, puts a spell on poor innocent Christabel while they are sleeping naked and it becomes impossible for Christabel to tell anyone about what she and Geraldine do in that bed. The spell works so well that even the speaker does not know exactly what happened. What we know is that they are both naked and there is a lot of talk about bosoms. It is the expression of supernaturalism and mystery:

In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
This is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!(Christabel , lines 267-268)

2.3 Nature in Byron's Poetry

Byron does not have a pantheistic view of nature. Natural elements are projections of the poet's feelings. The things of nature are described to reflect human features and emotions in his poetry.

The poet associates a gorgeous woman who is walking with a clear night sky full of bright stars. The finest light and darkness come together in harmony in this woman's appearance, particularly within her eyes. This gentle and delicate show of light is heavenly—undeniably, heaven usually refuses to grant this supernatural light to the showy day time:
She walks in beauty like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes (She Walks in Beauty: lines 1-4)

The poet warns against the growing inequality in his time and makes a prediction for what will take place in the planet if the human beings do not change this condition. He says that bright sun has been put out, and the stars in the night sky are wandering without light, as they too have been extinguished. There is nothing to guide them, just as mankind has lost its way. The state of the earth icy and due to the lack of light from the stars and sun, it is swinging blind and darkening in the moonless air.

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.

The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars

Did wander darkling in the eternal space,

Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth

Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air; (Deakness: lines 1-5)

2.4 Nature in Shelly's Poetry

Shelley considers nature as a solace provider. He trusts that nature exercises a healing influence on man's personality. He accepts that natural things are the sources of happiness and consolation.

The poet affirms that the song of a skylark is more joyous, clearer and fresher than the sound of spring showers on shining grass and on fresh flowers:

Sound of vernal showers

On the twinkling grass,

Rain-awaken'd flowers,

All that ever was

Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass (To a Skylark, lines 56-60)

The poet attains consolation from nature in the condition of separation or impermanence. When things die or disappear, they are used for special work or they remain live in our memory:

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,

Are heap'd for the beloved's bed;

And so thy thoughts when thou art gone,

Love itself shall slumber on. (Music, When Soft Voices Die: lines 5-8)

2.5 Nature in Keats's Poetry

Keats delights with a frank joy in landscape. He affirms that natural elements are projections of the poet's feelings. Nature provides him with sensuous pleasures.

The poet receives sensual pleasure by describing a lady, whom the knight met in the meadows, with long hair, light foot and carefree eyes:

I met a lady in the meads,

Full beautiful—a faery's child,

Her hair was long, her foot was light,

And her eyes were wild. (La Belle Dame Sans Merci, lines 13-16)

The poet mentions the sweetness of Spenser's poetry. He is greatly influenced and delighted by his poetry. The lines below appeal to the sense of hearing. He glorifies the favorite Elizabethan virtue of chastity in female characters:

A silver trumpet Spenser blows,

And, as its martial notes to silence flee,

From a virgin chorus flows

A hymn in praise of spotless Chastity. (Ode to Apollo: lines 30-33)

Conclusion:-

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats are the most famous English Romantic poets. Nature is a recurrent theme in their poetry; however they treat nature differently in their poetic works. Nature is treated as a godly being, a mystical source, a reflection of mankind, a healing and consoling power and a source of sensual pleasure by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats respectively. This article writer suggests that the readers should read Romantic poetry by focusing on how nature is treated by the poets for revealing their emotions, ideas and feelings.

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