



Supremacy of Imagination in Romantic Poetry

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Abstract: Imagination is one of the pertinent characteristics of Romantic poetry. Romantic poetry is subjective and extrasensory. The subjectivity and extrasensory instinct are rejuvenated due to heightened imagination. The prime purpose of this brief article is to elucidate how imagination plays a significant role in Romantic poetry. For this purpose, poetic works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats are analyzed. The writer has extracted some verse lines from some of the poems of these poets and has mentioned concisely how these verse lines signify the supremacy of imagination in their poems. This article is fruitful to the teachers and the students who are actually interested in studying English poetry.

Keywords: Imagination, Romantic poets, Romantic poetry, supremacy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Poetry is a prominent genre of literature. It is different from other genres owing to its musicality, emotionality and heightened imaginative hue. It is an elucidation of life through imagination and feelings (Hudson, 2002). Romantic poetry is the poetry of sentiments, emotions and imagination. It retains the characteristics like imagination, love for nature, escapism, melancholy, Medievalism, Hellenism, supernaturalism, and subjectivity. Romantic poets were those poets who followed Romanticism. Romanticism is 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. They disliked the set rules and orders of the neo-classical poets and furnished too much emphasis on emotion, imagination, originality and freedom in their poetry composed in commonly used natural language. English romanticism is both a revolt and a revival. It is a revolt against 18th century traditions and conventions; it is a revival of medievalism and old English meters and masters of poetry. The best known English Romantic poets were William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor

Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and John Keats. The writer has used some of the poems of these poets for the present study.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was a British Romantic poet from Grasmere, Lake District (Parrish, 2021). He condensed man's mystic relationship with nature. His famous poems are "Ode: Intimation of Immortality" and "The Prelude". Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was an English Romantic poet, literary critic and philosopher. He was a main figure in the Romantic Movement of the early Nineteenth Century (Beer, 2021). His popular poetic works are "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan", Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 – 8 July 1822) was one of the major English Romantic poets (Reiman, 2021). He was radical in his poetry as well as in his political and social views, his noted poems are "Prometheus Unbound", "Adonais", "Ode to the West Wind", and "Ozymandias" John Keats (1795 – 1821) was a leading English Romantic lyric poet (Hough, 2021). He became famous after his death for the power and vivid imagery of his Odes and epic "Endymion".

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2. Imagination in Romantic Poetry

Imagination is the aptitude to create and simulate unique objects, sensations, and ideas in the mind without any instant input of the senses. It is the faculty or action of creating new ideas, or images, or concepts of exterior things, not present to the senses (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). It can be taken as the hallmark of romantic poetry. It is a part and parcel of romantic poets. It draws on our understandings and information of the world around us and connects them with the completely unfamiliar entities to make something innovative (Lavelle, 2014). It is one of the most substantial themes of Romantic works. The creative power and propensity of the human mind to create images can be perceived in numerous poems of Romantic poets. The readers can realize the supremacy of imagination in Romantic poetry.

2.1 Imagination in Wordsworth's Poetry

Wordsworth takes imagination as an influential and vibrant force that functions with our senses and interprets how we view the world and its influences, and how we react to events. He trusts a strong imaginative life to be essential for our well-being. His imaginative efforts are often transformed into wonderful and fantastic moments in his poetic works. The poet recreates the whole atmosphere and recreates it with the help of his imagination. He can recall his childhood passion for the Cuckoo which was a voice, a mystery and an invisible thing.

He calls his past youthful days "visionary hours" because he cannot go back to those days in person, but he can only imagine them from his memory. The cuckoo reminds him of his cheerful days as he remembers it from his childhood. It is just his imagination that enables him to go back to be youthful and blissful:

Thou bringest to me a tale O visionary hours. (To the Cuckoo, lines 11-12)

The poet is pleasantly surprised to discover that the features that made the place so strikingly beautiful. He revisited Tintern Abbey after five years and imagery of the beautiful features are still alive and fresh even after moving to a city from there. He imagines he is still enjoying the place:

The beauteous forms,

Through a long absence, have not been to me. As is a landscape to a blind man's eye. (Tintern Abbey, lines 23-25). The poet feels happy to remember the memories of childhood. He is thankful as they are the source of natural feelings and knowledge to help a man look into the inner reality of worldly objects. His imagination is so powerful

that he can recollect the vision, the joy and then its loss in his early life:

And by the vision splendid

On my way was attended. (Odes on Intimations of Immortality, lines 28-29)

He remembers his childhood and muses how he grew up. He asserts that his soul had a very encouraging environment for its growth. He grew up being nourished by both beauty and pleasant fear:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Fostered alike by beauty and by 'fear' (The Prelude Book I, lines 301-302)

The poet makes a vivid comparison of a young girl's song with that of the "Nightingale" and the "Cuckoo". He claims that her song surpasses their songs. Her song has stopped him from going on his business. He is utterly enchanted that he says that her voice is so thrilling and sharp like that of the Cuckoo Bird, which sings to break the silence of the sea in the 'Hebrides' Islands. This poem is the creation of his imagination. He had neither seen the girl and place nor heard her song in his real life:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In springtime from the cuckoo bird,
Breaking the silence of the see
Among the farthest Hebrides (The Solitary Reaper, lines 13-16)

The poet sees a living spirit in the things in nature. He pronounces the every form, fruit, and flower, and even the scattered stones that cover the highway have lives capable of perceiving moral lessons. He says he gave them a moral life, and he saw them feel. It is his beautiful imagination:

To every natural form, rock, fruit, and flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway
I gave a moral life: I saw them feel. (Prelude Book III, lines 98-100)

The poet feels the winds blowing. The west where the sun sets down is an emblem of sleep. The surroundings become vibrant and tranquil due to the wind. To find all the earth gay is his sheer imagination.

The winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay. (Odes on Intimations of Immortality, lines 28-29)

2.2 Imagination in Coleridge's Poetry

Coleridge splits imagination into two fragments: primary and secondary imagination. It is the inherent quality of the poet that makes him or

her Creator. The primary imagination can be likened to poetic genius. The secondary imagination is a resonance of the primary.

The poet describes a silent frosty night that was disturbed by the cry of the owl. The other residents of his little country house are all asleep, leaving him alone. The readers can sense his discomfort, as he is sitting in silence at the midnight:

The owl's cry
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude (Frost at Midnight, lines 31-34)
The poet's imagination fetches him pictures of his childhood. He mirrors on the innocence of his young days and recalls the pleasures he relished as a child:
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!"
(Frost at Midnight, lines 31-34)

Coleridge exquisitely imagined and skillfully labeled what he had imagined about a palace about which he had read. He has attained remarkable success in making the description lively and complete. He writes as if he has seen it before him. The sacred river Alpha with a mazy motion ran through the woods and dales. Then it reached the unfathomable caverns and sank noisily into a lifeless ocean with a tumult. In that tumult Kubla Khan heard the voices of his ancestors. They warned him of approaching war and danger:

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean;
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war! (Kubla Khan, lines 25-30)

The poet describes Christabel's walk and prayer as if he has seen her. She walked stealthily and silently into the forest. She also breathed softly and lowly. On the oak tree, there was nothing green except the moss and the mistletoe, a parasitic plant which grew rarely on the oak. Having arrived beneath the huge oak tree, she kneels and prays silently:

She stole along, she nothing spoke,
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
And naught was green upon the oak
But moss and rarest misletoe:
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,
And in silence prayeth she. (Christabel, lines 31-36)

The poet is capable of reflecting the inner waves of the character through his imagination. The suffering of the ancient Mariner is portrayed by objective description rather than by analysis of emotion. The horror of the lonely man's situation under his curse is brought home to us, with unsurpassable force: Alone, alone, all, all alone, Alone on a wide, wide sea! (The Rime of Ancient Mariner, lines 232-233)

2.3 Imagination in Shelly's Poetry

Shelley splits the mental aptitude into two parts: reason and imagination. Reason is the account of the entities we have already known, separately and as a whole. Imagination is the discernment of the values of those entities. The reason respects the differences, whereas imagination respects the similarity of things.

The noise and commotion of the waterfall near the mountain are received by Shelley's mind, which is passive in comparison to such a powerful activity. Yet this is a two-way 'interchange'. He obtains the sights and sounds of the landscape, and in doing so, his mind comforts to fashion the significance of this colossal scene:

Thy caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion,
A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame;
Thou art pervaded with that ceaseless motion,
Thou art the path of that unresting sound. (Mont Blanc, lines 30-33)

Shelley employs the West Wind to signify the supremacy of nature and of the imagination inspired by nature. He personifies the West Wind. He calls the wind the "breath of Autumn's being" as if it has a human quality of having breath. He describes the wind as having "unseen presence" which makes it seem as though it is a sort of god or spiritual being that drives away death and ghosts. His imagination of the wind is really amazing:

O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
(Ode to the West Wind, lines 1-3)

The Skylark is a bird that symbolizes high imagination, eternal happiness and a herald of peace and progress. It is a spirit. Though it is unseen, it pours forth profuse sweetness. It stands for idealism and newly built society free from corruption and exploitation. The poet imagines the bird singing the mellifluous song that is a spontaneous art form:
Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart

In profuse strains of unpremeditated art. (To a Skylark, lines 1-4)

Shelley compares the nature of human life to that of "clouds" that veil the midnight moon. This is the first very well-defined reference to the notion of mutability. These clouds are described as "restless" and "speeding" they "gleam" as they "speed" past the "midnight moon." Briefly, they block it out, but soon they streak by. Their presence is beautiful and "radiant" but soon "Night closes round" and they are gone. Human life is beautiful and fleeting, so are these midnight clouds. This is a clear reference to mutability as it is emphasizing the ever-changing nature of the world, and the briefness of life. His imagination is based on the observation and his imagination deals with the bitter reality of life:

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed, and gleam, and quiver,
Streaking the darkness radiantly!—yet soon
Night closes round, and they are lost forever:
(Mutability, lines 1-4)

2.4 Imagination in Keats's Poetry

His poetry reveals a deceitful fantasy that creates our reality, a reality that remains uncertain beyond its aesthetic potential. Imagination embraces what Keats calls the negativity capability and stubbornly refuses to form social and political structures.

The poet is greatly impressed by the mellifluousness of the nightingale's song. He desires to be away from the concerns and cares of life by going to the nightingale. He does not wish to go on the chariot of Bacchus driven by leopards, but he wants to go there through poetic imagination: Away! away! for I will fly to thee,

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy, (Ode to a Nightingale, lines 31-33)

The poet employs a metaphor to express the silent repose and undiminished glory of the Grecian Urn for years. It has been conserved by quietness and time. He also designates the urn as a "historian" that can tell a beautiful story more sweetly than our poems. The pictures carved on its surface speak more sweetly than our poems:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme: (Ode on a Grecian Urn, lines 1-4)

The poet says that nature is alive and active at all times and in all seasons. During the summer when there is the intensity of heat all around and birds seek shelter in the shady trees, we can hear a voice moving from one bush to another of a newly reaped meadow. That is the voice of the grasshopper. He beautifully presents his imagination in his assertion of the phrase "the poetry of earth": The poetry of earth is never dead:

When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new mown mead.
(On the Grasshopper and Cricket, lines 1-4)

Keats employs a fairy's mortal love with human beings in one of the finest ballads "La Belle Dame Sans Merci". The poet tells the knight-at-arms that his forehead is pale like a lily and moist with the sweat of a painful fever. The color in your cheeks, once bright and lively as a rose, is fading extremely quickly:

I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too-- (La Belle Dame Sans Merci, lines 9-12)

There are numerous Romantic poems which deal with imagination as a supreme power, but only nineteen poems of these four poets are taken as a sample for writing this article.

CONCLUSION

Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats are the most popular English Romantic poets. They have superbly exploited imagination in creating their poetic works. Although they retain slightly different views regarding imagination, their imaginative aptitudes in their poetry are highly admired by the readers. Wordsworth views imagination as an influential and vibrant force, Coleridge as an individual's transitory replication of the divinity of the world, Shelley as the perspicacity of the values of the worldly entities, and Keats as an indispensable aptitude to recognize life and its magnificence. They are dexterously capable of unfolding their inner waves through their imagination. Their inner waves colored with imagination can be vividly perceived in their poetry.

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