

A Review on the Value of Imagination in Romanticism

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ABSTRACT

This literature review article strives to investigate the value of Romantic imagination. Romanticism is a style of art, literature, etc. during the late 18th and early 19th centuries that emphasized the imagination and emotions. Imagination in romanticism is of great value metaphysically because in romantic poetry, which is an actual literature, a reader is provided the ability to create mental images that are not literary existed. So many imagery images such as cloud at the sunset, blue and black sky, shining stars, elliptical galaxy, green and tall mountains, and riverbanks at the sunrise or sunset, singing birds on the branches of beautiful green and tall trees... can enable our mentality to enjoy our lives. Data for this article are collected through various reliable and relevant romantic books and journals. The main objective for the article is to motivate and attract the readers read romantic poetry that is artistically produced of images that takes the reader from the physical world to a metaphysical world. The article's main finding is that many European, American and Asian romantic poets have artistically created romantic poems.

Keywords: Imagination, Romanticism, Poetry, Images and Metaphysical.

1. INTRODUCTION

Imagination is the ability to produce and simulate novel objects, peoples and ideas in the mind without any immediate input of the senses. It is also described as the forming of experiences in the mind, which can be recreations of past experiences such as vivid memories with imagined changes or that they are completely invented (Szczelkun, 2018). Imagination according to Byrne (2007) is "a cognitive process used in mental functioning and sometimes used in conjunction with psychological imagery. It is

considered as such because it involves thinking about possibilities" (p. 38). Campbell, Walzer and Arthur (2003) asserted, "... there is no art whatever that hath so close a connexion with all the faculties and powers of the mind, as eloquence, or the art of speaking, in the extensive sense in which I employ the term. For in the first place, that it ought to be ranked among the polite or fine arts, is manifest from this, that in all its exertions, with little or no exception, (as will appear afterwards), it requires the aid of the imagination..." (108). In other words, Riasanovsky (1995) stated, "Imagination represents the afterlife either on high or in the depths or in metempsychosis. We dream of journeys through the universe, but is the universe not within us? We do not realize the profundities of our spirits. Inward is the direction of the mystic path. Within us or nowhere is eternity with its worlds of past and future" (p. 51).

English Romanticism, which was more suitable to the expression of emotional experiences, individual feeling and imagination, is best represented by poetry. The great English Romantic poets are usually grouped into two generations: the first, represented by William Blake, William Wordsworth and S. Taylor Coleridge; while the poets of the second generation were John Keats, P. Bysshe Shelley and G. Gordon Byron (Harvey, 1932).

Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* divides imagination into two kinds primary imagination as the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. In addition, the secondary imagination as the power by which man reconstructs objects out of the ideas of reason in his own consciousness (Shawcross, 1907).

According to Lowes (1986), Coleridge's imagination, at the period we are concerned with, was playing, like

heat lightning, about the remote horizons of the world. He also said that the long, slow process, old as the race, through which the frontiers of the known have steadily encroached upon the territory of the unexplored, has been a progressive conquest of new worlds for the imagination. For the imagination has always had two focal points: one fixed, the other perpetually advancing; one deep in the nature of men themselves, the other in "that untravell'd world whose margin fades Forever and forever when [we] move." In the great fictions of wayfaring and adventure, like the *Odyssey*, the two foci draw together.

The imagination strikes to what is universal - the unquenchable spirit of adventure and the insatiable desire to know - in the experience of men to whom new suns bring daily new horizons. In addition, it exercises its assimilating power upon whatever the quest has swept from the unknown within the widening circle of the known. Ulysses himself, and "straunge strondes" at the outposts of the world - the voyager, and the lore of lands beyond familiar sea-marks - furnish alike materials for the creative energy. However, voyages and travels have most powerfully engaged imagination in another way. For they are part and parcel of an almost cosmic process.

Above all things else, we must recall, the imagination is an assimilating energy. It pierces through dissimilarity to some underlying oneness in which qualities the most remote cohere. Now the perpetual adventuring of humanity along the perilous edges of the world have been steadily shifting the boundaries of the unknown and the known, and drawing what lies across the line within the circle. However, fresh conquests from the unknown arrive as aliens, invested with strangeness, and mystery, and romance (Lowes, 1986).

1.1. Imagination in Romanticism

The Romantic Movement is from nature to the imagination's freedom... and the imagination's freedom is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self (Bloom, 1970, p. 5-6). Imagination is of great value as Day (2001) has stated, "Romanticism gave a special importance to individual experience, that the faculty of imagination was of special significance and that this faculty was celebrated along with a profound sense of spiritual reality." In addition, he claimed, "Coleridge's later emphasis on spiritual matters, on the ultimate value of the individual imagination, is something which squares not with political radicalism but rather

with political conservatism, either explicit or implicit" (p. 176).

If we examine the characteristics of the actual literature that is/ was called romantic, we find throughout Europe the same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relation to man; and basically the same poetic style, with a use of imagery, symbolism, and myth, which is clearly distinct from that of eighteenth-century neoclassicism.

Wellek (1949) proposes three traits shared by those authors whom we still call Romantic: imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style. According to him, Byron did not see the imagination as the fundamental creative power, and Blake stands somewhat apart with regard to nature.

Ferber (2005) said, "Creative imagination, genius, and nature are closely associated with one another in the beliefs of the British Romantics, and yet these tenets can be traced back well into the eighteenth century, when writers such as Edward Young and Alexander Gerard laid the groundwork for the Romantics by exploring the creative power of imagination with recourse to Shakespeare" (p. 35).

Imagination in Romantic Novels help the audience to follow the fictional characters on the stage from one place to another (Manzoni, 1843). He also said, "It is the mind of the spectator which follows them - he has no travelling to do except to imagine to himself that he is traveling [sic]. Do you think that he has come to the theatre to see real events?" (pp. 257-60). Similarly, he has also said that the stories for which Ludwig Tieck is best known such as Fair-Haired Eckbert, Love's Enchantment take up the question: who am I? The revelations of self in these Novellas are fatal; they open up abysses of memory, of the past, blurred lines between imagination and reality, where the mind cracks and madness and death beckon.

1.2. Imagination in Romantic Poetry

Cook (1891) in *A Defence of Poetry* defined poetry as the expression of the imagination. Whereas, Keats believed that the ultimate reality is to be found only in the imagination. Through imagination, Keats seeks an absolute reality in which he appreciates beauty through the senses.

According to Abrams (1953), "Romantic poetry, with its emphasis on individual feeling and imagination, is a worthy stimulus to 'a humanistic literary criticism' which carries an 'indictment of the brutalizing

influence of an industrial and commercial society; and [an] insistence on individual values against the growing pressures toward mass conformity" (p. 334). Moreover, Bowra (1950) observed, "if we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and in the special view which they took of it" (p. 1). In addition, Parker (2004) declared, "Poetry should be the handmaid of the imagination, and the foster-nurse of pleasure and beauty: Mr. Crabbe's Muse is a determined enemy to the imagination, and a spy on nature" (p. 80).

The concept of the romantic imagination according to Bowra (1950) is as his main explicatory device. This is because of: First, there is Wordsworth's conviction that at times he was in another world, which was more real than that of the senses, a world not of sight but of vision. Secondly, his entries into this world were closely connected with his creative and imaginative faculties. It was the justification of his poetry, and he believed that his acquaintance with it was due to his imagination, which, in creating, had moments of visionary clairvoyance. Thirdly, when he had this experience, he felt that he had passed outside time into eternity. He was then so unaware of the common ties of life that he had a timeless exaltation. The three notions are closely allied, though they are distinct enough on analysis.

Imagination in the words of Akenside (1772) is expressed as what was to become a key Romantic term – imagination – in exploration of the relations between mind and nature. He in his poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* emphasizes how the human imagination is stimulated into activity:

To certain species of external things,
Attune the finer organs of the mind:
So the glad impulse of congenial powers,
Or of sweet sound, or fair-proportion'd form,
The grace of motion, or the bloom of light,
Thrills through imagination's tender frame,
From nerve to nerve: all naked and alive
They catch the spreading rays: till now the soul
At length discloses every tuneful spring,
To that harmonious movement from without
Responsive.
(Akenside, 1772: 16)

Parker (2004) asserted that the imagination of Northern men soars beyond this earth, on which they live; it soars through the clouds on the horizons that are like the mysterious gateway from life to eternity. European literature saw a continent divided by geography,

climate, and politics. In the warm South, writers, basking in the lovely Mediterranean sunlight, had been filling their poems with color and voluptuous imagery since the days of Homer. By contrast, the frozen wastes of the North had given rise to the most original and sublime poetry. Whatever the legacy of classical Greece or Renaissance Italy, Northern Europe was the true homeland of the modern Romantic imagination, its ultimate ancestor, the ancient Scottish bard, Ossian.

Ideas of passion, feeling, and imagination, emphasizing the "vehemence and fire" of the earliest poetry, and the "picturesque and figurative" quality of its language rather than presenting an opposition between artistic creation and social function. Blair also argued that the usefulness of ancient poetry lay in its expression of imaginative freedom and undisguised passion (Ferber, 2005).

Ferber (2005) has said that Romantic Scotland was at once a wild place where the imagination could roam freely, and a barren landscape inhabited largely by the wildlife. It was both an intellectual powerhouse, where educated people tackled the obstacles to modern progress energetically, and a country characterized by religious austerity and opposition to change. Scotland of Romanticism is really multifaceted: shifting, dazzling, and as various as its weather. Since Romanticism is itself notoriously elusive and open to debate, Scotland offers numerous possibilities for further exploration of the Romantic Movement and the Romantic period. Thus, Fichte admits that in order to "raise feeling to consciousness" the imagination must produce an "image" of that feeling, one whereby consciousness would be enabled to recognize its immediate "feeling of determinability" in objective form and thus take hold of a knowledge that had previously slumbered in the encrypted form of an "intellectual intuition."

The characteristics and contradictions of Italian Romanticism, according to Ferber (2005) are that Giordani's arguments and terminology are themselves Romantic. While he acknowledges the severe limitations of contemporary Italian literary production, he disproves the strategy of foreign imitation. Giordani asserted that Italian culture, by which he meant language, literature, intellectual climate, and imagination, must be the source for any literary renewal. Nevertheless, Leopardi was explicit in his rejection of several Romantic tenets. Although he considered poetry to be both an imitation and a gift of nature, he did not interpret imitation as a representation of reality. His dismissal of realism had to do with poetic creativity, which he considered a product of the

imagination, and with poetic pleasure, which he saw as the aim of poetry. He argued that truth and realism were contrary to poetry because they limited both the imagination and the sense of wonder (the source of poetic pleasure). Leopardi was also critical of what he discerned as the Romantics' tendency to shift poetry from a sensory to an intellectual activity – an aspiration that he found to be in contradiction with their stated goal of producing a popular literature.

Foscolo and Leopardi are outcast poets, Foscolo out of political and idealistic commitments, and Leopardi out of an inability to forge human relationships; the former an extrovert, and the latter an introvert. Despite their materialistic convictions, both sought consolation in nature and in the poetic imagination.

Like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Keats, and Edgar Allan Poe, Leopardi sought to use the kind of words and sounds that through their very indefiniteness tend to activate the imagination. Leopardi likens the ancient poets to children, filled with “the infinite workings of the imagination.” Leopardi, like William Wordsworth conceived of the poetic sublime as arising from our experiences of childhood’s “first affections / Those shadowy recollections” (Ode: Intimations of Mortality, ll. 152-3, in Wordsworth 1950: 461). The memory of the past is always a memory of a childhood experience.

Just as Pindar served as the paradigm of the Sublime for Longinus, so the ode provided Shelley with a poetics of pure imagination, of deep feeling Mont Blanc capable of liberating humankind from the tyranny of what is empirically given. For Coleridge, then, the “poetry of nature” emerges from two main sources: fidelity to the “truth of nature,” and the “modifying colors of imagination.” Just as “accidents of light and shade” have the power to transform a “known and familiar landscape,” so too the poetic imagination can transform ordinary experience into something extraordinary. In the view of many Romantic artists and writers, humans are transformed by their proximity to the natural world: the senses are unfolded, the imagination is kindled, and the heart is awakened (Ferber, 2005).

Beiser (2003) asserted that in *A Defense of Poetry* Shelley makes to point one of the two modes of mental action, and defines poetry “in a general sense” as “the expression of the Imagination.” Thoreau writes in *Walden*, “The morning wind forever blows, the poem of creation is uninterrupted; but few are the ears that hear it”. Wordsworth’s *Peele Castle* may be one of the great examples of ekphrasis or description of painting, but he also wrote *The Power of Music* and, more

important, claimed “The mind of man is fashioned and built up / Even as a strain of music” (1799, *Prelude* ll. 67-8). Though he was interested in paintings and made efforts to see them, Coleridge believed that a man of mere talent could incorporate imagery into poetry, “But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination” (Ferber, 2005).

Lowes (1986) said, “Now I suppose that both Coleridge and Wordsworth would insist that we are confronted, in these diverse products, with the operations of two different powers: Fancy in the lines from the “*Destiny*,” Imagination in the stanzas from the “*Mariner*”. Fancy, which “has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites”: Imagination, which ‘dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create’; Fancy, which “does not require that the materials which she makes use of should be susceptible of change in their constitution from her touch”; Imagination, which “recoils from everything but the plastic, the pliant, and the indefinite”. Nevertheless, I have long had the feeling, which this study has matured to a conviction, that Fancy and Imagination are not two powers at all, but one. The valid distinction, which exists between them, lies not in the materials with which they operate, but in the degree of intensity of the operant power itself. Working at high tension, the imaginative energy assimilates and transmutes; keyed low, the same energy aggregates and yokes together those images which, at its highest pitch, it merges indissolubly into one” (p. 95).

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2. CONCLUSION

As imagination is the forming of experiences or ideas in the mind, it is of great value in the Romanticism. Imagination is a key Romantic term that explores the relations between mind and nature. Imagination in Romantic Novels help the audience to follow the fictional characters on the stage from one place to another. Romantic poetry that emphasizes on individual feeling and imagination is a motivation to a humanistic literary criticism, which accuses the dehumanizing influence of an industrial and commercial society. For Coleridge, the poetry of nature emerges from two main sources. The first is fidelity to the truth of nature, and the second is modifying colors of imagination. His imagination was

playing like heat lightning, about the remote horizons of the world. Like Coleridge, Keats, and Poe, Leopardi sought to use the kind of words and sounds that through their very indefiniteness tend to activate the imagination. Poetry in a general sense should be the handmaid of the imagination. According to Shelley, poetry in a general sense is the expression of the Imagination. Whereas, Keats supposed that only in the imagination, the ultimate reality is to be found. British Romantics believed that creative imagination, genius, and nature are closely associated with one another.

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