

Transition of Romanticism Through Ages.

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INTRODUCTION

Romantic Poets have always been viewed as Nature poets. The stereotype of nature, pastoral, or sceneries has been the trademark. But as literature students, we come across the point, is romantic poetry limited to nature, sky, river, and brooks?

The best part about this small question is the ambiguity of the answer. On the superficial level, romantic poetry and Victorian poetry are confined to nature poetry. But Blake and Wordsworth are not the torchbearers of romanticism. The credit goes to Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of poetry. Chaucer has written The Canterbury tales has elements of romanticism.

On a short note, what is romanticism?

After my extensive research, I could join the dots between Chaucer's writing, Shakespearean plays & sonnets, and Keats' poetry.

Romanticism is not 'romanticizing' the male and female leads. It is the work of modern media! In literature, romanticism means exploration of the unknown, going beyond the limitations, and digging into the unknown. Shakespeare's Othello is a very romantic character. He has been to the far East and was a Black moor himself. The idea of romanticism is not limited to his love for Desdemona. The character himself is mysterious enough to capture our eyes.

Similarly, Chaucer's pilgrims have a variety of shades. The wife of the bath, the priest, the knight, or the cook; these characters belong to very different strata. They are romanticized by Chaucer and live in forever.

Taking into consideration the precursors of the Romantic Age in England. Poets like Thomas Gray, William Blake, William Cowper, Robert Burns propagated the idea of: Expand the points

- Solitary figure
- Social non-conformist
- Rebels

In Gray's Elegy Written In Country Churchyard, we see the condemnation of Cromwell's policy, Milton's mockery, and Hampden's critic.

"Some village Hampden that with dauntless breast,
The little Tyrant of his fields withstood,
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood..." (line 57-60)
Ranging from anger to some iconic lines like:
"The path of glory lead but to the grave." (Line 36)
And, "Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth."

The beauty of words is so reflective. From being a critic of govt. policies to writing about universal truth, his poetry subjugates the stereotype of romantic poetry as love or nature poetry. Even the graveyard school of poetry focused on the human mind and taught life lessons more than any philosopher.

The idea of science and industrialization being limited to Victorian poets as opposed here. "Fair Science" shows the poet is steps ahead of his time. The timeless beauty of Romantic Poets is the small details. The ability to ponder upon the future and present at the same time is truly mesmerizing. This is why these poets stand aloof in their criticism.

Coming to the first generation of romantic poets: William Blake, ST Coleridge, or William Wordsworth; notably, the name romantic poetry is rather a Romantic Revival.

The actual first generation of Romantic poets is from 14th Century. Geoffrey Chaucer is not only the father of English poetry but also Romantic poetry. His works like *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The House of Fame*, or *The Book of Duchess* show mystique characters, lots of subjectivity, medievalism, and adherence to ideal and infinite wisdom. Therefore, the romantic revival in the 19th Century credited to the poets is a bias.

Coming back to the Romantic Poets, the most notable names: William Blake, William Wordsworth, ST Coleridge, John Keats, PB Shelley are notable for their Romantic Hellenism. The references from Classicists made them stand out. They might borrow ideas from Classic literature at times but added subjectivity to thoughts.

Taking in consideration the poet William Blake, the most problematic poet of Romantic Age. He had visions which were the muses for his poem. His poems in a way reflect the very pessimistic approach happening around him.

In the chimney sweeper, he presents it as

“And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
 And he opened the coffins & set them all free;”

The idea is very resonating with the modernist who didn't like the sombre dystopia occurring around them. They were warned so by Blake who didn't believe to show the solution to anything rather present ideas as they were. His hatred for classicists for similar reason is very plausible.

The rampant death due to starvation, loss of work, industrialization, lack of identity shaped into existentialism, identity crisis, pessimism of the modern period. All these ideas had been somewhat romanticized through the nature aspect by Blake himself. Therefore, he remains the most important figurines of the research.

The poem *The Tyger*, where he gives Greek references of Prometheus, the act of stealing fire which is burning the world and punishing till date or the idea of Vulcan, the great craftsman shows that he didn't altogether hate Classics but the idea of their frivolous display of wealth when one section of life is at mercy of other didn't sit well with him. In his London, there is much chaos and the ills of society out for display. On the other hand, Wordsworth the poet laureate of the period presented the beauty of London in the mornings but they are 'devoid of human'. The element of realism is correctly analyzed in his poems.

The same idea is so beautifully put by Mark Twain, where he finds the balance between the Blacks and Whites i.e Jim and Huck only in the lap of nature. Elsewhere, it is the breeding for disparity, prejudice and stereotypes.

Taking the example of *Rime of Ancient Mariner*, which was published in *Lyrical Ballads*. The publishing of *Lyrical Ballads* marks the advent of the romantic period according to several literary critics. ST Coleridge emphasized the biblical allusions w.r.t the albatross.

On the surface, it feels like the story of 'victory of good over evil' but, on deconstructing the poem we come to start to question the authenticity of the narrator.

A mariner on the sun and sea is bound to get sick; both physically and mentally. So, who in their right mind would trust a 'glittery eye' man?

The poetic genius of Coleridge makes this poem have a mark on readers to this date. The ever soft, forgiving God is shown in a repented, passive-aggressive state. This not a nature description, rather a description of human nature. The subjective charms shown by the poets live long.

On coming to 'Daffodils' by William Wordsworth; it is a timeless classic. Wordsworth has spun the beauty of Daffodils on the outer level, but this poem highlights solitude, loneliness, and poetic imagination to the extent of social anxiety. A person interested in craftsmanship is bound to have some solitude, any inspiration from muses needs some time to ponder upon. This is why we have classic poetic silence. Seeing daffodils just as yellow flowers will be so unfair to Wordsworth's hidden meaning of solitude and muses.

Nature is very important for Romantic poets because nature is the best teacher and muse. But confining the artistic geniuses of the Romantic Age merely to nature is as discriminatory as confining feminism only to women's rights.

Going further to Mathew Arnold or Robert Browning, we see poems like *Dover Beach*, *The Last Ride Together*, *Scholar Gypsy*.

These poems often the underrated ones have so many elements of Romanticism as well as Modernism. Taking into account *The Last Ride Together*, one can't dismiss it as a poem of sexual nature.

The poet has underlined the question of satisfaction and living. Does he say what is the purpose to life if you have no incentive to chase? This idea was adopted by Modernist writers.

“We, fixed so, ever should so abide What if we still ride on, we two With life forever old yet new Changed not in kind of degree. The instant made eternity- And heaven just proved that I and she Ride, ride together, forever ride.”

The ending paragraph has a juxtaposition in the same poem: “I sink back shuddering from the quest Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?”

When the poet goes pensive, he calls the last ride an eternity but the same poet is inclined to say that the incentive to live is unsaid desires and hope. The duplicity in ideas is so human-, and relatable. This is why Romantics are the most quoted and interpreted poets.

In Scholar Gypsy, the references to a carefree alchemy scholar often bring out Chinua Achebe’s references in my mind. But then the contexts are very different. Arnold is appreciative of alchemy but then, confining alchemy to the gypsies has always been problematic. In the end, gypsies are happy creatures, devoid of industrialization problems is the real romantic moment of the poem.

Poets have written so much; critics have analyzed much more. But even to this day, we can have numerous interpretations of the Romantic poets. No study is enough when the subjectivity of human emotions comes into play. No words are ever enough to capture human minds. But the attempt of Romantic Poets to try and write about this is beyond mesmerizing. This is probably why they live forever.

To quote “Child is the father of man” because the interpretations will live on as long as we read is no exaggeration. None at all!

REFERENCES

- [1]. Elegy Written in Country Churchyard (Gray, Thomas)
- [2]. The Last Ride Together (Browning, Robert)
- [3]. The Rainbow (Wordsworth, William)