

## EXTENSION OF ROMANTIC CANON- AN OVERVIEW

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The Romantic Period in English Literature (1798-1830) contributes a major share in the history of English Literature. Romanticism, generally speaking is the expression in terms of art of sensibilities and complex feelings. Spontaneous emotions and boundless imagination rocked the age. It introduces the world of strangeness and beauty. Pater refers it as “the addition of strangeness to beauty”. He further adds that the desire of beauty is a fixed element in every artistic organization. Of course two elements- curiosity (intellect) and beauty (emotion) were the prominent in the Romanticism. A subtle sense of mystery and exuberant intellectual curiosity are also the prominent elements. It stands for freedom and liberty and brought Liberalism in Literature. It paves the way for wonder and delight.

The Romanticism came out of Renaissance that brought transformation in the entire European life and letters and followed by classicism. It gave new leaven to art and literature, and the poetry witnessed complete break from traditions. The poetry is born out of contrast to the neo classical poets. W. J. Long says, “The Romantic Movement was marked and is always marked by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom, which, in science and theology, as well as in literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit”. The poetic interest was transferred to the natural beauty and loveliness of nature from artificial decorations of drawing rooms in the country life. In poetry there is added zest and simplicity having closer touch with the beauty and charm of Nature. A feeling of humanitarianism coloured the poetry of age. It marked the intense human sympathy and a consequent understanding of human heart. Supernaturalism is also another quality of this age. A sense of wonder and mystery was imparted to poetry of this age. Subjectivity began to have its full play. It was individualistic in outlook. An endless variety was found in the poetry with lyricism and simplicity in style.

The age has been studied by numerous critics and scholars like Lillian Furst, A. O. Lovejoy, Rene Wellek and others. The age was fascinated by the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron and Shelley. These poets too did not turn to God as the source of order. They found harmony in life connected with the natural world. The source of order was internal in the work of Wordsworth where he interacts with the natural world. He was aware of the disordered, puzzling and fragmented part of life. He and the others emphasized natural and uncorrupted feelings and emotions. But this is stereotypical account of Romanticism which in many senses sounds incomplete and partial. Jannifer Breen, for instance, asserts, “The history of Romanticism has frequently been dominated by an assumption that a small group of poets is representative of forty diverse years of literary creativity”. Actually the period includes the works of Robert Southey and Robert Burns and it should be studied with the works of William Hazlitt and Mary Shelley.

Thus not only five or six male poets from British Romanticism but also another aspect of Romanticism viz. reality comes in the work of contemporary women poets like Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Jonna Baillie, Mrs. Felicia Brown Hemans and Leticia Elizabeth Landon. It

means that our conventional view of Romanticism has to be reorganized considerably. Like the leaders Wordsworth and Coleridge the women poets mentioned above followed the upsurge of freedom and aroused social consciousness. They too felt free to give play to their imagination and individualism, and to concern themselves in their writings with the humanitarian objects with the Nature. No doubt Wordsworth revived lofty ideas, Byron brought back a touch of glamour, Shelley again breathed music into poetry and Keats re-kindled the fires of beauty at the same time the women writers exhibit the same characteristics. Even they handled the same theme, forms, Gothic elements, imagery, and diction. Stuart Curran in his article, 'The I Altered' places the male and female poets of the Romantic era together in formal and thematic dialogue without privileging the former.

On the thematic background for instance we find the similar elements in Keat's Nightingale and Charlotte Smith's Nightingale. Both sing a melodious song in the same note. Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'The Proud Ladye' has similar theme and atmosphere with Keat's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. Felicia Brown Hemans 'The Rainbow' reminds one of Wordsworth's 'My Heat Leaps Up When I Behold Rainbow'. Her Skylark like Shelley's skylark is in flight and can be heard singing a joyous song. In both the poems the bird flies in the golden sunlight. But Hemans' skylark finally achieves the status of a divine object that makes the speaker turn inward and praises its creator.

Like Blake, the theme of childhood fascinates Joanna Baillie in 'To A Child' when she echoes Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'. Mary Robinson's 'The Poor Singing Dame' is a gothic tale of crime and punishment with supernatural elements like Coleridge's 'The Rime of Ancient Mariner'. The Lord of the castle is envious of the happy song of the dame and he threatens her to stop singing. She dies in a miserable condition. After her death, the Lord is haunted and goes ghostly and dies. He has to repay the sin he has committed. The atmosphere is ghostly and evocative of terror.

As far as the form of poetry is concerned, both the male and female poets of the Romantic era discarded heroic couplet and satire. They turned to forms like sonnet, ode, ballad, lyric and so on. Charlotte Smith and Mary Robinson wrote sonnet sequences like Spencer and Shakespeare. Smith's 'Elegiac Sonnets' were so popular that it underwent ten subsequent editions. Robinson's 'Sopho and Phaeon' is a famous sonnet sequence. Ode seems to be another popular form with the women poets of Romantic era. Mary Robinson and Letitia Elizabeth Landon wrote many odes like that of John Keats. Lyrics and narratives are usually found in Felicia Hemans. Ballad is popular form in the Romantic poetry. Robinson's 'The Proud Ladye' is a ballad like Keat's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' or Wordsworth's 'Lucy Gray'. Mary Robinson published her collection of poetry in 1800 and like Wordsworth's it was called Lyrical Tales.

The Romantic women poets used the same imagery from the world of nature that is used by Keats. Hemen's imagery in 'Skylark' has similarity with Shelley's Skylark because it flies 'high above the morning cloud' just as Shelley's Skylark flies 'o'er which clouds are brightening. Robinson's 'when the moon shone across the wide common, they hooted' in 'The Poor Singing Dame' has striking similarity with Coleridge's 'As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted/By woman wailing for her demon lover' in 'Kubla Khan'. In both the poems, moon evokes gothic atmosphere. Joanna Baillaie's imagery merely echoes Wordsworth's imagery.

Both the male and women Romantic poets of the era discard the Neo-classical diction with bombastic artificial word. They prefer simple colloquial language free from artificiality. Love of the Orient is another prominent feature of the age. Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', Thomas

Moore's 'Lalla Rookh' or Robert Southey's 'Thalaba- The Destroyer' are truly steeped in the spirit of orientalism.

Hence, women poets of the Romantic era affirm the creative power of imagination like their male counterparts. They wrote about the nature of individual self and the value of individual experience. They tend to explain human society and its development in terms of an organic model borrowed from nature. They introduce new way of looking at nature. Their work exhibits a preference for nature in its sublime aspects; mountains, glaciers chasms, storms, as well as strange and exotic setting as the male Romantic poets did.

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