

The Romantic Tenets in the Poetry of William Wordsworth

Dr. Chirag M. Patel¹

ABSTRACT:

This research work focuses on “The Romantic Philosophy in the poetry of William Wordsworth. The Romantics focus on landscape because of its natural essence and its spiritual composition. The Romantics aim at fighting for the masses and educating the public on how nature can be better treated and appreciated. He present the beauty and enjoyment of life in which he find himself as imaginary and visionary. This work examined the theory of romanticism in romantic poetry using William Wordsworth. Wordsworth own most of his poetic resources and characters to nature as he strongly believe in the power of nature that brings all that is good to life.

KEYWORDS:

Romanticism, Naturalism, Nature, Rhyme scheme, Revolution.

¹ (Asst.Professor - SIT Affiliated to Gujarat Technological University, Vadodara, Gujrat, Inida
Email - cmpatel1983@ymail.com

INTRODUCTION:

Romantists believe in naturalism and realism in the place of morality. They believe that man should not be confirmed or stereotyped to one norm of code rather derive pleasure from what he derive from nature. Be that as it may, more emphasis is not laid on the thematic study of Romantic poetry rather that the beauty is derived in its form following the theory of arts for art's sake. "Nature" meant many things to the Romantics, it was often presented as itself a work of art, constructed by a divine imagination, in emblematic language.

This paper aims at analyzing three of William Wordsworth poems namely "My Heart Leaps up when I behold", "The World is Too Much With Us", and "The Daffodils" or "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud". The Romanticism theory will be used to analyses these poems as it has been stated in the methodology.³

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:

The purpose of this research work is to introduce to the reader what Romantic poetry is all about. The researcher aims at portraying critically the works of William Wordsworth as Romantic and emotional writer. The product of imagination and emotion will be showed in his poetry. He championed the values of human being politically and value-wise. The writer store for freedom of thought

without any act of selfishness. The Study also focuses on the age of Romanticism and its impact in the society. It showcases the power of nature on man with reference to William Wordsworth.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY:

This research work is embarked upon to show the natural essence of the Romantic writer. Romantic writer as it can be seen in the poetry of William Wordsworth finds happiness in isolating himself from this world to the other world of nature full of peace, joy, happiness, health, love and sympathy. To him, the only source of comfort is a nature. There have been researchers on issues and topics relating to nature but this study is showcasing the element of nature in the poetry of William Wordsworth as he is lover of nature.

METHODOLOGY:

The researcher will source for materials from libraries and internet. The major study is taking a critical look at selected poetry of William Wordsworth based on the writing of the Romantics and his ideology.

Romanticism emphasized intuition, imagination and feeling, to a point that has led to some Romantic thinkers being accused of irrationalism. Romanticism focuses on nature: a place from society's judgment and restrictions. Romanticism blossomed after the

age of rationalism, a time that focused on handwork and scientific reasoning.

The Romantic Movement developed the idea of the absolute originality and artistic inspiration by the individual genius which performs a “creation from nothingness” this is the also called Romantic ideology of literary authorship which created the notion of plagiarism and the guilt of derivativeness. This idea is often called “Romantic Originality”. The Romantic Poets ‘turned their beliefs on originality into “The institution of originality”’.

THE NATURE OF WILLIAM WORDSWORTH’S POETRY:

Wordsworth referred a reflective vacant and pensive mood to a restless research for scientific knowledge. He believed that we learn more by communicating with nature or talking to country people rather than reading books. He believed that harmony with nature is the source of all goodness and truth. Nature was the watchword for the romanticists but in a very different way.

William Wordsworth was the quint-essential poet, a naturalist, who pays close attention to details of the physical environment around him (plants, animals, geography weather). At the same time, William Wordsworth was a self-consciously literary artist whose works were referred to as Wordsworthian. Wordsworthian ‘nature’ emerges as much as product of his widespread reading as of his wondering amid the affecting landscapes of the Lake District. His poems often present instances when nature speaks to him and he responds by speaking for nature. William Wordsworth’s ‘nature’ points us away from the closed word of ethnocentric symbol of making towards the unstable world of postmodern meaning.

William Wordsworth’s works during the Romanticism era followed little of rules and authors were free to write as they felt. This era began to change during the French revolution and continued through the industrial revolution.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

“MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD”:

The romantic poets have reverent attitude to nature. Whenever they came across any agent of nature, they tend to worship it William Wordsworth demonstrates such attitude when he comes in contact with the rainbow, therefore, the poem is a kind of nostalgic recollection. The poem “MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD” is a nine lines, one stanza poem and its brevity contributes to its effectiveness. It is in a form of a narrative poem. The poet recounts his experience with the rainbow, he becomes highly elated and his spirit becomes lifted up. This is shown in line one and two thus: 37

My heart leaps up when I behold

A rainbow in the sky. (Lines 1-2)

From there, he goes into a philosophical consideration of the experience saying that the rainbow like other agents of nature is permanent.

So was it when my life began

So is it now I am a man

So be it when I shall grow old

Or let me die (Lines 3-6)

The same lines also suggest the ephemeral nature of man who unlike the rainbow cannot exist forever. He is born, grows old and eventually dies. The poet personae in line 7-9

goes on to say that it is easier for a child to appreciate nature better than an adult who has pre-occupied his mind on worldly affairs.

The child is the father of man

And I could wish my days to be

Bound each by natural piety (Lines 7-9)

This preference for worldliness is the subject of “The World Is Too Much with Us”, another poem that would be treated by the same poet. The poet personae then conclude by suggesting that man should learn from his childhood reverent regard (a feeling of profound respect) for nature.

ROMANTIC THEMES IN THE POEM “MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD” BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

The beauty of nature can be seen in the poem. Common experience and common sense show us that the rainbow has seven distinct colours which are violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. These are said to be the brightest of all colours. Therefore, their combination is exquisite and charming. This beauty is a source of attraction to the poet who finds himself under its spell. Another theme found in this poem is the permanence of nature. Nature is an everlasting phenomenon. It is not limited by time and space. It is continuous. According to the poem, nature is said to possess such a quality. It connives man and continue to exist from generation to generation. Man is a temporary being on the surface of the earth. Therefore, his days are few and filled with sorrow. Nature however, is a source of solace to him.

THE STYLES, STRUCTURE AND FORM IN WILLIAM WORDSWORTH'S “MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD”:

The poem is made up of a single stanza in

terms of structure. The lines are unrhymed and therefore it is a blank verse in terms of poetic form. Also, it is a lyrical ballad. By Romantic poetry stanza, a lyrical ballad is a short poem in which the poet expresses his personal thought or feeling. The language of the poem is rustically simple. This should not surprise us since Wordsworth has stated in the preface to his lyrical ballad: the principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems was to choose incident and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men.

The word ‘rainbow’ is a biblical allusion or reference. God destroyed the first world with flood because of violence and all sorts of ungodly practices. However, the bible records it that Noah found favour before the Lord. He and his family were saved, the rest of the world perished. After the destruction, God sent ‘Rainbow’ as a sign of his covenant with Noah that he will no longer destroy the world with flood again. The rainbow is being used in the poem as an agent of nature.

Also, the poem can be said to represent the presence of God and its various colours to represent the attributes of God. Violet for instance, can represent the love of God, just as blue represent God’s peace and red being a symbol of God’s judgment.

“My Heart Leaps up When I Behold” in line 1 is a ready example of personification. The act of “leaping” ordinarily belongs to a man as a living object not human heart. The expression “leaps up” is a phrasal verb which has synecdoche in it too as the heart represents the human body as a whole.

“The child is the father of man” in line 7 is an example of paradox. Originally, it means that it is a child that grows up to become a father

in the future; but in the context of the poem it shows that a child is closer to nature than an adult. The permanence of nature is contrasted to the transient nature of man. Therefore, nature is more valuable than man. Finally, the mood of the poet is an exciting one.

ROMANTIC TENETS IN "THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US" BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

This poem written by William Wordsworth is essentially a tribute and glorification to nature. According to the poet, nature plays a leading role in the life of every society and should be guided jealously at all cost. It should be treated with great care, respect and admiration. Enough restraint is needed on the part of the individual as regard to the manner they relate to nature and its resources. The society should see nature as their most valuable asset considering the immense benefits they derive from it. It provides us with the basic needs of man; food, shelter, and clothing. It takes care of both the living and dead. In fact, the contributions of nature to human life cannot be over-emphasized. William Wordsworth in this poem says that we dissipate much energy on material or earthly things instead of coming closer to nature where we can find happiness in life. He says we can enjoy life to its fullest only if we can live in harmony and agreement with nature. It is only when we embrace nature that we can reap the immense benefits associated with it. The poet poetically puts it as thus:

The world is too much with us

Late and soon, getting and spending

We lay waste our powers, little

Did we see in nature that is ours; we have

Given our heart away a sordid boon!

The poet compares live in a rural or village

setting with our lives in the urban areas or cities. Wordsworth who is a romantic poet prefers the beauty of rural lives to the struggle and pursuit of material gains, referred in the poem as 'getting and spending' hence we can adequately appreciate the beauty of nature because we take active interest on earthly desires.

This sea that bares her bosom to the moon, The winds that will be howling at all hours and are gathered now like sleeping flowers for this, for everything we are out of tune In these lines, the poet captures the romantic and fantastic imagery and passionate level of nature that we fail to see. The world is created in God's perfection with an established order. It is because we the inhabitants of the earth is ungodly and have departed from the established rules set by God. To the poet, 'nature is society and society is nature'. But what worries the poet most is that man has abandoned all the natural endowments at his disposal in pursuit of earthly values which cannot last long. We have failed woefully to appreciate and make adequate use of the good qualities of nature: the 'winds', 'sea', 'moon', and 'sleeping flowers'. It is because we have failed to live in accordance and agreement with nature that we are devoid of peace, order and stability; hence we are 'out of tune'.

It moves us not Great God! I'd rather be a pagan suckled in a

Creed out worn, so might I, standing on this pleasant lea, have

Glimpses that would make me less forlorn; have sight of Proteus

Rising from sea; or hear old triton blow his wreathed horn.

Progressing in lines 9-11, the poet by his oath prefers being a pagan bent on primitive

beliefs, to living a life far away from nature. He says that he might stand on the ‘pleasant lee’ (open grassland) and contemplate on his desperate state of affair, a situation where mankind bestowed with abundant talents appear so indifferent, so ungodly and so deceitful that poet is left with no hope and is completely too tired to comprehend this state of affair. The poet settles on the open place to have wide a view of the whole situation, from there, he could also sight ‘Proteus’ (god of sea) or hear old ‘triton’ (another sea-god) blowing his wreathed horn/trumpet. The message passed in this poem is powerful, clear, didactic, and worthy of emulation, should mankind need to appreciate nature and its natural endowments. It is only when we behold nature that we can enjoy to its fullest.

THE ROMANTIC LANGUAGE AND FORM IN “THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US” BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

The poem is a sonnet (a fourteen lines poem) with its economy of language. It is a Petrarchan sonnet. It has an octave (first eight lines) and sestet (last six lines). Its rhyming scheme of ABBA, ABBA, and CDCDCD follows the Petrarchan rhyming scheme. William Wordsworth’s poem is written in a very simple, clear and straight forward language. There is hardly any word in the poem that would pose problem to an average reader, except a few words like ‘Proteus and Triton’, ‘lea’ (line 11) ‘sordid boon’ (line 4) and ‘wreathed horn’ (line 11). The simplicity of language enhances the readers understanding of the poem. The general mood captures in the poem is that of anger, hopelessness, despair, doom and disaster while the tone is serious, harsh, sharp and that of castigation and condemnation of man’s neglect and abandonment to nature. Two examples of personification are prominent in the poem:

(a) *‘The sea bares her bosom to the moon’*

(b) *‘the winds that will be howling at all hours’*

Here the ‘sea’ and the ‘wind’ do not have any life really but in the poem they are given human qualities. Alliteration was used in the poem in

(a) ‘Bares her bosom’

(b) ‘Great God’

(c) ‘We waste’

The poem has a great moral lesson on human society. The society is being advised to come close to nature. Enough restraint is needed on the part of the individual as regards to nature and its resources. It is only when we embrace nature that we can reap the immense benefits associated with it.

THE ROMANTIC THEMES IN “THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US” BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

There is a relationship between man and nature in the poem. Man cannot do without nature. There is a genuine pleasure as seeing, hearing and feeling the freshness of the world. Nature associates with both physical and spiritual health. The landscape and the natural world are not just seen for their beauty, but for their ability to express some of the elusive truth and perceptions of mind. Another theme in the poem is the failure of man to appreciate nature. Nature has a lot to bestow on man but it is quite unfortunate that man fails to appreciate it. Yet, man and nature combine to make a complete and ideal environment. Man’s flimsy excuse for failing to appreciate nature is too mundane and unreasonable. It puts man in a losing end. The beauty of nature is seen in natural objects such as sea, moon, wind and flowers. This constitutes part of the bio-geographical features that make the

world what it is.

AN OVERVIEW OF "I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD" OR "THE DAFFODILS" BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

The happenings in the poem is quite simple but the meaning of the incident is however more complex. The poet is alone taking a walk beside a lake. He suddenly comes across a field of beautiful flowers known as 'Daffodils' swaying in the wind. This makes him very excited and happy. The happiness does not stop at the lake side. Any other time he remembers, he recaptures his mind to the scene and it brings him unlimited joy. William Wordsworth provides us with the details of this simple experience in four stanzas. The poet wanders alone in stanza 1 and suddenly comes across plenty of golden-coloured Daffodils under the trees beside a lake. The wind blows over them and so they bend from side to side according to the direction of the wind:

I wandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high over vales and hills, when all at once I saw a crowd, a host of golden Daffodils

Beside the lake, beneath the trees.

In stanza two, the poet is overwhelmed by the uncountable number of the Daffodils. They are 'crowd', a 'host' and as many as the 'stars' in the sky. The poet could not simply believe it

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze, continuous as the stars that

shine and twinkle on the Milky Way, they stretched in never ending line along the

margin of a bay.

In stanza three, the breeze causes the waves in the lake to also move from side to side. Still, the movement of the Daffodils swaying from side to side is better to watch. The poet is so emotional and happy that he does not know how long this scene is going to be on his mind afterwards and what pleasure it will bring him.

I gazed and gazed – but little thought what wealth the show to me had brought.

The poet discovers afterwards in stanza four that very often when he is alone, he suddenly remembers this scene and his loneliness turns into happiness. You can rightly say that nature represented in this poem by the Daffodils keeps the poet company, so to speak. It thus prevent him from being lonely; "A poet could not be gay, in such a ground company".

ROMANTIC STYLE LANGUAGE AND THEMES IN "THE DAFFODILS" BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:

William Wordsworth combines his narrative and descriptive skills to write "The Daffodils". The poem has a structure that allows you to hear, to see, to participate and to make up your mind. In this way, it is true to say that even the structure of the poem makes it easier for you to understand the message of the poet. The soft and melodious sounds of the rhyming words combine with the three beat rhythms that are fairly consistent to make the poem musical – this is soothing and suitable because since everything in the poem seems to be dancing, the mood must be a gay one. The musical quality of the poem provides this mood. Wordsworth uses a skilful choice of words to emphasize this happy mood. You can re-consider the following words in this

regard: floods, golden, fluttering, dancing, tossing, sprightly, jocund, gazed, and bliss. All these words are associated with happiness and deep satisfaction. The poem is four sets of sextet, each sextet deals with an aspect of the experience. The rhyme scheme of the poem is ABABCC, DEDEFF, GHGHII and JKJKII. The two situations of the poet-personae are contrasted. At first, he was disorderly and later becomes orderly having come in contact with nature. Also, through the use of contrast, we are able to see the Daffodils as better dancers than the waves. The poet employs the use of comparison to create vivid mental picture and to show the extent of the topic being discussed; "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (line 1). The poet compares his haphazard movement to that of a cloud that is floating on high over vales and hills. Fluttering and dancing in the breeze continuous as the stars that shine and twinkle on the Milky Way (line 6-8)¹⁰The poet compares the continuity of the dance of the Daffodils to the continuous shining star above stretching across the sky: 'the milky way'. The poet uses exaggeration for the sake of emphasis and magnitude; "A host of golden Daffodils ten thousand saw I at a glance". The poet says that the Daffodils are made of gold, 'Golden Daffodils' to stretch its beauty and preciousness. He also claimed to have seen ten thousand Daffodils at a glance. It has been described as the proper environment or condition for the right contemplation of nature. The Romantic poets prefer the tranquillity and serenity of the rural environment to the contamination and

complexity of the city life by implied contrast, the poet, his life in the rural environment makes the poet to think deeply and have a right view of life.

The first line of the poem paints the picture of a helpless poet wandering about aimlessly and would have continued the roaming about had it not been his sudden perception of the Daffodils, he stops wandering about, things that are not necessary. This shows that nature is an agent of orderliness. God is not mentioned throughout the poem but is implied. The Daffodils are 'placed' beside the lake and beneath the trees. The Daffodils need to survive and at the same time, the Daffodils should not be over-exposed to the scorching sun therefore its placement beneath the trees is ideal. It shows that God of providence is demonstrated in nature.

CONCLUSION:

William Wordsworth as romantics urges that a union with nature is what frees the mind from the stir and thrust of its own dark emotions. William Wordsworth himself felt that whatever is abiding in the composes of the mind attained was the result of its being linked with nature. An embrace with nature and its aesthetics gives man the required happiness and joy. From the poems of William Wordsworth, the readers could enjoy the fantasy of returning to nature and a mystical life. Appreciating the philosophy of seeking an existence so close to nature and far removed from the strains of civilization in what romanticism is preaching.

About the Author:

Dr. CHIRAG M. PATEL working as an Asst. Professor (science and Humanities Department) and coordinator in Sanskar Institute of Technology affiliated to Gujarat Technological University, Vadodara. I hold Ph.D. in English Communication Skills and M.A. in English Literature. My research falls into three strands English Communication skills (ELT), linguistic theory and methodology.

REFERENCES:

1. Abrams, M. H. (1953): *The mirror and the lamp: romantic theory and the Critical Tradition*: London pp. 7, 8, 8-29
2. Adewoye, S. A. (2006): *Lecture Note on The English Romantic Period of English Literature* (Eng. 315), Unilorin 2006/2007 Academic Session.
3. Balogun, Y. (2008): *Lecture notes on the age of romanticism of English Literature* (Eng. 214) Unilorin 2007/2008.
4. *Book On English Language Cycle 3* Published By: National Teacher's Institute, Kaduna (238-244).
5. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2008): *Romanticism* retrieved from *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*. Britannica.com. Retrieved 2010-08-24
6. Gill, S. (1961): *William Wordsworth* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wordsworth
8. <https://wordsworth.org.uk/daffodils.html>
9. Masson, S. (2001): *Romanticism*; *Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Olajide, A. O. (2006): *University Literature: Anthology of Textual Analysis*, Ilorin, Haytee Press and Publishing Co. Nig. Ltd (275-281).
11. Okoye, G. C. (2005): *Total Study Edition Series with Questions and Answers*, Onitsha, Gabon Educational Publisher (57-62)
12. Watson, J. P. (1992): *English Poetry of the Romantic Period (1789-1830)* New York: University Press.
13. Williams, J. (1996): *William Wordsworth, a literary life*: Martins Press Inc.