

Nature as a Vehicle to Express Thoughts in the English Poetry of the Romantic Period (1757-1822)

Mohamed Jabraddar Mahil Abd Allah

Department of Languages and Translation, Faculty of Education and Arts, Northern Border University, Arar, Saudi Arabia, PO Box 1321 Post Code 91431

Abstract

This study has attempted to examine the use of nature as a vehicle to express thoughts in the English poetry of the romantic period (1757-1822). It has aimed to explain the role of nature as a dominant factor in inspiring the poets of the romantic period to express different thoughts. It has also aimed to show how the romantic poets appreciate nature, love and social life. Six poems were selected, randomly, to represent the English poetry of the romantic period (1757-1822). The poems were analyzed quantitatively. Results showed that various figures of nature were used by the poets in order to express their thoughts. According to the results, the study suggests that it will be useful, for future researchers, to study the socio-culture aspects in poetry. In addition, to study other periods of poetry rather than the romantic period.

Keywords: Romanticism, Romantic poetry, Nature in the romantic poetry, poetry studies

DOI: 10.7176/JLLL/56-018

Publication date: May 31st 2019

Introduction

Poetry has been written in all ages across history. Human, worldwide, are aware of poetry. Therefore, poetry is not defined according to national political boundaries. Poetry plays significant roles in different areas of human's life. One of these roles is to express human feelings; whether it is love, happiness, suffering, desires, anger or agony. It also reflects man's relationship with nature and beauty. In these aspects it emphasizes the need to understand the importance of the environment in human life and how to keep it from destruction. So, are likely human to understand that they are part of it, and are, therefore, able to change and reshape it at their will. Poetry develops the audience critical thinking in various possible meanings. Thus, there will be an interesting communication between the poet context, the text context and the audience context. Therefore, many ideas, experiences and insights are created by the reader which make him an active partner in exploring new events in the world by adding more concepts to the texts. In addition, poetry depicts historical events which took place in the past and how these events influenced people life. By doing so, poetry transmits culture from a generation to another and from a nation to another. Moreover, it addresses all kinds of conditions and people; whether they are doctors, farmers, lawyers, religious men etc.

In the field of education, poetry plays an essential role by helping students in the following aspects:

1. recognizing patterns in sounds and syntax
2. expanding vocabulary
3. developing speaking
4. stimulating imagination

Towards the end of the 18th century, an intellectual movement known as romanticism originated in Europe. This movement reached its peak in the period from 1800 to 1840. The most well known poets of the romantic era are:

1. William Blake (1757 – 1827)
2. William Wordsworth (1770 – 1850)
3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 – 1850)
4. Lord Byron (1788 – 1824)
5. Percy Bysshe Shelly (1792 – 1822)
6. John Keats (1795 – 1822)

The romantic era is, basically, characterized by the free expression of feelings, the concept of the genius who had the ability to create his own work, the reaction to the industrial revolution in Europe and the revolution against the aristocratic and political norms of that age. Moreover, romanticism was a search for freedom in personal, political and artistic life. It was also against the conventions which were followed at that time. In art, romanticism emphasized the intellectual free expression of imagination and liberation of emotions, the glory of self by means of intuition and senses; and the heroes and visionaries that freed the romantic artists from the church and the state.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Literary studies, in general, and poetry studies, in particular, attempt to solve problems that encounter learners in understanding literary texts. Learners of poetry may find vagueness of interpretation of poems presented by literary critics. Therefore; such studies try to make significant contributions to literary and critical theory,

because it is considered as a powerful tool in the interpretation of poetic texts.

3 Aims of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explain the role of nature as a dominant factor in inspiring the poets of the romantic period to express different thoughts.
2. To show the role of romantic poetry in appreciating individual, love and social life

1.4 Research Significance

This research attempts, first, to contribute to more deep understanding of poetry because poetry is considered as the most difficult among the three literary genres. This understanding is achieved by shedding light on patterns which may be vague for learners and others who are interested in poetry. Therefore, it may help them to attain better understanding of poetry and discover and understand different themes of poems. Thus, they acquire logic and reasoning skills. Moreover, poetry is likely to motivate future researchers to undertake studies in other areas of literature. In addition, it presents lessons that readers learn about life.

1.5 Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is nature used as a vehicle to express thoughts by the English poets of the romantic period?
2. What figures of nature incorporated in the poetry of that period?
3. What thoughts that are highlighted in the romantic poetry?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

In order to find answers for these questions above, the following hypotheses have been made:

1. Nature is used as a vehicle through which romantic poets express their visions.
2. Different figures of nature are found in the romantic poetry.
3. The romantic poetry highlights love beauty, innocence, childhood and dreams.

Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature

Watson (1992), summarizes the subject matter of the literary work of the romanticism in raising these questions that focus on what the romantic artists were engaged with: Who am I? How did I come to be as I am? What is my relationship to my fellow human beings? What are my feelings in relation to their joy and their suffering? What great moments do I wish to celebrate? What do I know of nature, or art? What is the best form of a political society? What is my understanding of the past, and my hope of the future? Watson (1992), regards that the writers of the romantic era (novelists and philosophers, as well as poets) attempted to find answers to these questions using their poetic style Thornley and Roberts (1984), describe romantic poets as poets of nature. They say that Wordsworth and Coleridge are known as Lake Poets because they like Lake district and lived in it; so the two poets are connected with nature. While Shelly saw goodness is in the whole of nature. Thornley and Roberts (1984), also assert that Keats, as one of the great romantic poets, loved beauty. Matters and Jones (2000), argue that the dominant romantic approach understands poetry as a medium for the exploration of personal emotional issues and feelings. Matters and Jones (2000), also point that romantic poetry often sees man in communion with the natural world, rather than with other men, it trusts instinct, the emotion, the heart, rather than reason. Chouduray (2011), discusses the language through which William Blake and Wordsworth depicted realistic lives of common people in their poetry. He analyzed some poems of the two poets. He found that both the poets paid equal devotion to common people in their poems. So, they gave importance to rural life, which is shaped by nature, rather than urban life. Almandovar (2014), examines how the concept of nature appears in the 19th century English literature by comparing the different uses that romantic poets and Gothic novelists made of it. He showed how nature is depicted in the romantic poetry written by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelly. He found that nature was important in the literature of that period as one of the main elements that gives shape to a wide variety of poems and novels.

In the light of the above discussion, it is obvious that romantic poetry is, mainly, characterized by imagination, intuition, idealism, inspiration and individuality. So, poets of that era, according to Watson (1992), led a striking movement of changing man sensibility and his ideas about the society in which he lives; as well as the natural world which surrounds him.

Methods

Data Collection

Materials

The materials of this study are six poems written by Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelly and Keats. The poems are samples of the English poetry of the romantic period (1757-1822)

Procedures

To achieve the objective of this study the procedures adopted were as follows: Six poems of equal length, from the poetry of those six romantic poets were selected. The figures of nature in these poems were investigated.

Data Analysis, Discussion and Interpretation.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study will be shown in tables and with the distribution of the frequency of the words that represent figures of nature as appearing in the poems under investigation. This analysis will highlight the significant similarities between the use of the figures of nature in the poems investigated.

Table 1: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "The Echoing Green" by Blake

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 'The Echoing Green' by Blake | human happiness (old and young) innocence | the sun, skies, spring, sky-lark, thrush, birds, oak, nest |

Discussion

'The Echoing Green' by William Blake

In his poem "The Echoing Green", Blake draws attention to the nature as a source of happiness for human, old and young. The thought that Blake emphasizes is human happiness and children innocence. He portrays nature as a source of happiness. In order to express his thoughts, Blake uses the sun, skies, spring, skylarks, thrush, birds, oak and nest as figures of nature, as shown in table 1. This idea is depicted in the poem below.

*The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies,
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells' cheerful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
In the Echoing Green*

*Old John with white hair,
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk.
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say:
"Such, such were the joys
When we all, girls and boys,
In our youth time were seen
On the "Echoing Green."*

*Till little ones weary
No more can be merry
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end:
Round the laps of their mothers,
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,*

*And ready for rest;
And sports no more seen,
In the darkening Greening.*

Table 2: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "Three Years She Grew in Sun Shower" by Wordsworth

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| "Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower" by Wordsworth | nature as man's best educator | sun, shower, flower, rock, plain, fawn, lawn mountains springs balm, clouds, willow, storm, midnight, rivulets, dell |

'Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower' by William Wordsworth

Nature is the best man's educator is an idea and a lesson presented by Wordsworth's poem 'Three Years She Grew in Sun and Shower'. Wordsworth depicts nature as a nurse. In this poem he attempts to emphasize the influence of nature on human life. The figures of nature which the poet uses so as to enable him express his thoughts are: sun, shower, flower, rock, plain, fawn, lawn, mountains springs, balm, clouds, willow, storm, midnight, rivulets and dell.

*Three years she grew in **sun** and **shower**,
Then Nature said a lovelier **flower**
On earth was never shown;
This child I to myself I take;
She shall be mine and I will make
A lady of my own.*

*Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse: and with me
The girl in **rock** and **plain**
In **earth** and heaven, in **glade** and **bower**,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.*

*She shall be sportive as the **fawn**
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the **mountains springs**;
And her's shall be the breathing **balm**,
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.*

*floating **clouds** their state shall lend
To her; for her the **willow** bend;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the **storm**
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy*

*The **stars** of **midnight** shall be dear
To her; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where **rivulets** dance their wayward round,
And beauty born in murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.*

*And vital feelings of delight
Shall her form to stately height,*

*Her virgin bosom swell;
 Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
 While she and I together live
 In this happy dell.*

*Thus nature spake – The work was done
 How soon my Lucy's race was run!
 She died and left to me
 This health, this calm and quiet scene;
 The memory of what has been,
 And never more will be.*

Table 3: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "The Rose" by Coleridge

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| "The Rose" by Coleridge | love, feelings, beauty of beloved | flowers, garden, petals of rose, wreath, dew, |

'The Rose', by Samuel Coleridge

Coleridge's poem 'The Rose', demonstrates ideas of love, feelings and beauty of beloved. In this poem, Coleridge's emotional frankness is clear in expressing his feelings to his beloved referring to the most beautiful aspects in nature that resemble his darling Sara. The poet says that the beauty of nature and the beauty of his beloved made him inebriate. In the poem, he uses flowers, garden, petals of rose, wreath and dew as figures of nature.

*As late each **flower** that sweetest below:
 I pluck'd, the **Garden** pride!
 Within the **petals of a Rose**
 A sleeping Love I spied*

*Around his brows a beamy **wreath**
 Of many a lucent hue;
 All purple glow'd his cheek beneath,
 Inebriate with **dew**.*

*I softly seiz'd the unguarded Power
 Nor scared his balmy rest:
 And placed him, caged within the **flower**,
 On spotless Sara's breast*

*But when unweeting of the guile
 A woke of the prisoner sweet,
 He struggle to escape awhile
 And stamp'd his faery feet.*

*Ah! soon the soul-entrancing sight
 Subdued the impatient boy!
 He gazed! he thrill'd with deep delight!
 Then clapp'd his wings for joy.
 "And O!" he cried – "Of magic kind
 What charms this Throne endear!
 Some other Love let Venus find –
 I'll fix my empire here"*

Table 4: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "The Wild Gazelle" by Byron

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| "The Wild Gazelle" By Byron | beauty of nature, freedom of animals | gazelle, hills, rills, cedar, palm, plains, earth, stone |

'The Wild Gazelle' by Lord Byron

Byron's poem 'The Wild Gazelle', portrays the beauty of nature with its green hills, animals and rivers. In addition, it draws the attention to the importance of animals freedom in humans life. It is considered as a message to people by advising them to protect the wild life. Coleridge describes the wild gazelle in Judah's hills where it drinks and eats from the natural sources; jumping and moving happily. This nice animal attracts beholders because there is nothing that disturbs or frightens it. So, the poet advices man not to be a destructive weapon of nature, so as to allow it to endow beauty to people. As in the poems above, this poem includes gazelle, hills, rills, cedar, palm, plains, earth and stone as figures of nature.

The wild **gazelle** on Judah's hills,
Exulting yet may bound,
And drink from all the living rills
That gush on holy ground:
Its airy step and glorious eye
May glance in tameless transport by. :-

A step as fleet, an eye more bright,
Hath Judah witness'd there;
And over her scenes of lost delight
Inhabitants more fair,
The cedars wave on Lebanon,
But Judah's statelier maids are gone!

More blest each palm that shades those plains
Than Israel scatter'd race:
For, taking root, it here remains
In solitary grace:
It cannot quit the place of birth,
It will not live in other earth.

But we must wander witheringly,
In other land to die;
And where our fathers' ashes be,
Our own may never lie:
Our temple hath not left a stone.
And Mockery sits on Salem's stone.

Table 5: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "Night" by Shelly

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| "Night" By Shelly | dreams, the tranquility of night | wave, night, cave daylight, sea , land, dawn, dew, noon, flower, tree, bee |

'Night' by Percy Shelly

In this poem Shelly presents the idea of dreams and tranquility of night which is one of the moments that marks human life with comfort and joy. The poet wants night to come quickly in order to replace the long daylight. He says night weaves dreams, whether joy or fear, as well as it is the moment for tranquility, relaxation and sleeping. In addition, he expresses his disappointment by day time which is like an unloved guest. Moreover, he states that death is similar to night time. Although he does not like to die soon, he thinks being dead will most likely to be a relief. The figures of nature which appear in this point include wave, night, cave, daylight, sea, land, dawn, dew, noon, flower, tree and bee.

SWIFTLY over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave, --
Where, all the long and lone daylight,
Though wovest dreams of joy and fear

*Which make thee terrible and dear, --
 Swift be thy flight!*

*Wrap thy form in mantle grey,
 Star-inwrought!
 Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
 Kiss her until she be wearied out,
 Then wander o'er city and **sea and land**,
 Touching all with thine opiate wand –
 Come, long-sought!*

*When I arose and saw the **dawn**,
 I sigh'd for thee;
 When I rode high, and the **dew** was gone,
 And **noon** lay heavy on **flower and tree**,
 And the weary Day turn'd to his rest,
 Lingering like unloved guest,
 I sigh'd for thee.*

*Thy brother Death came, and cried,
 Wouldst thou me?
 Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
 Murmur'd like a noontide **bee**,
 'Shall I nestle near thy side?
 Wouldst thou me? -- And I replied,
 No, not thee!*

*Death will come when thou art dead,
 Soon, too soon --
 Sleep will come when thou art fled.
 Of neither would I ask the boon
 I ask of thee, beloved **night** --
 Swift be thine approaching flight,
 Come soon, soon!*

Table 6: Distribution of Figures of Nature in "A Thing of Beauty" by Keats

| Poem | Thoughts Expressed | Figures of Nature |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| "A Thing of Beauty" by Keats | The Influence of beauty of nature on life | bower, flowery band, the sun, the moon, sheep daffodils, rills, forest, rose |

'A Thing of Beauty' by John Keats

In his Poem 'A Thing of Beauty', Keats aims at highlighting the influence of nature on life. He says that a beautiful thing is considered as eternal which resembles the power that makes people live in tranquility and enjoy a sleep full of sweet dreams and health. The poet depicts the beauty of nature saying that it keeps us bind to the nature. Enjoying the beauty of nature with its flowers, trees, the sun, the moon and rills, is man linkage with the earth. In addition, the tales of human ancestors about their heroes form another aspect of beauty which is regarded as a kernel of life and a source of joy. Keats embodies the beauty of nature by pointing to the following figures of nature: bower, flowery band, the sun, the moon, sheep, daffodils, rills, forest and rose.

*A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
 Its loveliness increases; it will never
 Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
 A **bower** quiet for us, and a sleep
 Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.
 Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing*

*A flowery band to bind us to the earth,
Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-dark'd ways
Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits. Such **the sun, the moon,**
Trees old and young, sprouting a shady boon
For simple **sheep**; and such are **daffodils**
With the green world they live in; and clear **rills**
That for themselves a cooling covert make
Gainst the hot season; the mid-**forest** brake,
Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-**rose** blooms;
And such too is the grandeur of the dooms
We have imagined for the mighty dead;
An endless fountain of immortal drink,
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink*

Conclusion, Findings and Recommendation

This study has attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explain the role of nature as a dominant factor in inspiring the poets of the romantic period to express different thoughts.
2. To show the role of romantic poetry in appreciating individual, love and social life.

By examining the role of nature as a vehicle to express the thoughts of the poets of the English poetry of the romantic period (1757-1822), the study has sought to record every occurrence of figures of nature that appear in the studied poems. By doing so, the study has attempted to document the figures of nature used in the poems under investigation. The six poets have been chosen because they are considered as the great poets of that period, as critics claim. In addition, their poetry is marked by the values of the romantic period, such as appreciating nature, political freedom, individual and freedom. Then, highlighting the figures of nature and thoughts expressed in the poems have been given special consideration.

According to tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, it is obvious that all the poets expressed their thoughts by utilizing nature as a vehicle that enables to express these thoughts.

Finding

On the basis of the results, the following findings have been recorded:

1. Nature is used as a vehicle through which the romantic poets express their thoughts. This finding answers question 1 in the questions of this study.
2. Various figures of nature are incorporated in the poems under investigation. Some of these figures are the sun, the moon, skies, birds, flowers, mountains, rivulets and dew. This point answers question 2 in the questions of the study.
3. Different thoughts and ideas are expressed by the poets in the poems selected for the study such as human happiness, innocence, love, beauty of beloved, freedom of animals, dreams and the influence of nature on life.

Suggestion for future research

The researcher draws attention to the following areas for future research:

1. It is worth to study the socio-cultural aspects in poetry as poetry is a rich domain that reflects the culture of different nations and societies.
2. Studying other periods of poetry rather than the romantic poetry in order to be aware of the ideas emphasized in those periods.

About the Author

Dr. Mohamed Jabraddar Mahil Abd Allah is an assistant professor at Northern Border University, Faculty of Education and Arts. His research interests include linguistics and literature. He participated in some conferences and workshops. He published articles in linguistics and literature. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8622-4034>

References

- Abd Allah, M. J. (2017). *Investigating Cohesive Devices In The English Poetry Of The Romantic Period (1757-1822)*. Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Khartoum.
- Abd Allah, M. J. (2019). *Investigating Cohesive Devices in Wordsworth Poetry*. Arab World of English Journal

for Translation & Literary Studies, Vol3, no1. Pp 157-177.

Choudhury, T. H. (2011). *Common People in the Poetry of William Blake and William Wordsworth in the Romantic Period*. Published MA Thesis: East West University.

Matterson, S. & Jones, D. (2000). *Studying Poetry*. Bloomsbury Academic: London & New York.

Stephen, M. (1984). *An Introductory Guide to English Literature*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Thornley, GG. & Roberts, G. (1984). *An Outline of English Literature*. Longman: Hong Kong.

Watson, J. R. (1992). *English Poetry of the Romantic Period (1789 –1830)*. Addison Wisely New York: Longman.