

A Critical Analysis of Nature in Literature

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Abstract- This study is conducted to discover the literary value of the word nature in literature. The word nature is used in English language denoting different meanings in different contexts viz. character, property, creation and so on. This paper tries to focus on nature in literature especially nature (alternate spelling Nature) in the philosophy of 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. The main objective of this study is to encourage readers to particularly refer to the beauty of Nature and enjoy the creation of this physical universe. It is also an objective of this study to gently differentiate the different meanings of nature in different contexts. The data for this study is collected through reliable and relevant books and then collected data are analyzed by categorizing in two sections, for example, the nature as a romantic phenomenon, and nature as a human character.

Index Terms- Nature, Literature, Romanticism, Imagination.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Nature as a romantic phenomenon:

To philosophize, . . . is but to carry good-breeding a step higher, for the accomplishment of good breeding is, to learn whatever is decent in company or beautiful in arts; and the sum of philosophy is, to learn what is just in society and beautiful in Nature and the order of the world (Shaftesbury, 1900, II: 255).

When reason loses its moral authority and becomes less normative, "sentiment," that curious combination of emotion, reason, and sensation, rises to take its place as the representative of our natural and normative inner self. Along with this changing notion of the self follows a new perception of our position within nature and nature within us. Taylor calls this change the "Deist shift":

For the ancients, nature offers us an order which moves us to love and instantiate it, unless we are depraved. But the modern view, on the other hand, endorses nature as the source of right impulse or sentiment. So we encounter nature . . . , not in a vision of order, but in experiencing the right inner impulse. (Taylor 1989: 284)

'In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred. Nothing is secure but life, transition, the energizing spirit.... People wish to be settled; only as far as they are unsettled is there any hope for them.'

'Man ... cannot be happy and strong until he ... lives with nature in the present, above time.' (Whicher, 2006).

John Dryden (1631-1700), for example, distinguishes between art and nature, genius and learning when he refers to Shakespeare:

All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found it there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him . . . (Dryden [1668] 1962, 1: 67)

In Dr. Johnson's preface to his edition of the plays, published in 1765, Shakespeare is "above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life" (Johnson, 1968: 62).

If the artist copies mere nature, the natura naturata, what idle rivalry! If he proceeds only from a given form, which is supposed to answer to the notion of beauty, what an emptiness, what an unreality there always is in his productions, as in Cipriani's pictures! Believe me, you must master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man. (Coleridge 1907, 2: 257)

Sublimity was the keynote of the ancient bard of Scotland, and although Blair emphasized the moral character of the Ossianic sublime, his prose warms to the idea of a natural genius in native surroundings:

Amidst the rude scenes of nature, amidst rocks and torrents and whirlwinds and battles, dwells the sublime. It is the thunder and lightning of genius. It is the offspring of nature, not of art. It is negligent of all the lesser graces, and perfectly consistent with a certain noble disorder. It associates naturally with that grave and solemn spirit, which distinguishes our author. (Blair 1996: 395)

While Romantic tourists set off for Scotland in search of waterfalls, rocks, and poetic flights, many journeyed north attracted by reports of rich fare and abundant game. Gilpin may have guided readers towards the romantic banks of the Tay, but tour-writers such as Colonel Thornton were sharing first-hand knowledge of the ptarmigan, grouse, and deer. If Wordsworth was moved by the poverty and simplicity of life in rural Scotland, Thornton was struck by its luxury "what few possess, viz. roebucks, cairvauns, hare, black game, dottrel, white game, partridges, ducks and snipes; salmon, pike, trout, char, par, lampreys and eels" (Thornton [1804] 1974: 227).

Romantic poetry is progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of

art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society ... (Schlegel, 1991)

The principal topics around which Novalis's work is structured are religion, love, poetry, and death. *Hymnen an die Nacht*, a six-part poem written mainly in prose and published in the *Athenäum* in 1800, tells of a longing for a "holy, ineffable, mysterious night" (der heiligen, unaussprechlichen, geheimnisvollen Nacht) and for death, intertwined realms of beauty, love (including erotic love), innocence, and oneness with Nature and with God. (Novalis 1989).

Following the ancient Greeks, Schleiermacher (1968), contrasted "ethics" (as the "speculative science of reason") with "physics" (as the "speculative science of nature"), a usage that reflects Aristotle's notion of rational human beings who live in a world (ethos) that is distinguishable from nature. Ethics seeks to attain a coherent and consistent view of the abiding forms of the human world; history ("the empirical science of reason") strives to understand the actual unfolding of it.

Far from being critical, Hegel views the youthful work of his contemporary as an important expression of the age's longing for an adequate understanding of religion and the relationship between man and nature. Schleiermacher has a higher conception of the capacity of understanding to assist in the reconciliation with nature and with the universe as a whole. Against Hegel, Schleiermacher wishes to be conscious of a divine spirit within him that is other than his own reason and against Jacobi, he claims he "will never give up seeking out this [spirit] in the deepest depths of the nature of the soul. (Schleiermacher, 1968, p. 117)

This solitude of essence is not to be mistaken for a view of our position in nature. Our position in nature, nature will severely Avenge. We are tenderly alive to love and hatred. ("The Heart," *Early Lectures*, 2, p. 280)

According to Bowra (1961), "In nature, all the Romantic poets found their initial inspiration. It was not everything to them, but they would have been nothing without it; for through it they found those exalting moments when they passed from sight to vision and pierced, as they thought, to the secrets of the universe."

Enlightenment questioning of existing civilization through a eulogy of nature went hand in hand with the tendency of political radicals to word their challenge to the existing order with images of natural energy. Stephen Prickett has observed that in England from the very beginning many pro-Revolutionary writers had been employing images drawn from nature and the natural world, often with . . . implications of irresistible forces at work shaping human destiny. For [Thomas] Paine it forms one of the dominant images of Part II of *The Rights of Man*, which had been prepared for by earlier references to the Revolution as a new 'spring'. (Prickett 1989: 7)

The movement of quest-romance, before its internalization by the High Romantics, was from nature to redeemed nature, the sanction of redemption being the gift of some external spiritual authority, sometimes magical. 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: 5–6)

In pre-Romantic poetry dealing with landscape the objects of nature are described and a reflection or a moral is, as it were, simply appended to the description of the natural object. The 'paysage moralisé was not', says Abrams, . . . On Coleridge's

philosophical premises, in this poem nature is made thought and thought nature, both by their sustained interaction and by their seamless metaphoric continuity. (Bloom 1970: 223)

One could even say that progress has been made not only in defining the common features of romanticism but in bringing out what is its peculiarity or even its essence and nature: that attempt, apparently doomed to failure and abandoned by our time, to identify subject and object, to reconcile man and nature, consciousness and unconsciousness by poetry which is "the first and last of all knowledge." (Wellek, 1962)

Every man is defined by his nature, as a landscape in nature is limited by the horizon; and that nature can be read in his "character," as a poem is read. The poet, too, is defined by his landscape (and here Emerson brings the senses of nature as character and nature as countryside together), which if he is true to himself will be found, down to the last straw, in what he writes. This solitude of essence is not to be mistaken for a view of our position in nature. Our position in nature, nature will severely Avenge. We are tenderly alive to love and hatred. ("The Heart," *Early Lectures*, 2, p. 280)

Recently Sarah Pratt (1984), writing on Russian romanticism, distinguished five concepts of nature among the poets and writers of that eclectic and somewhat confusing period: (1) a static setting for human activity, (2) the impetus for poetic reverie, (3) a mirror of the human soul, (4) man's partner in the metaphysical universe, and (5) the Absolute, "the source, the point of return, and the measure of all phenomena of the universe including man."

1.2. Nature a Human character:

A phenomenon such as the *Speeches on Religion* may not immediately concern the speculative need. Yet they and their reception – and even more so the dignity that is beginning to be accorded, more or less clearly or obscurely, to poetry and art in general in all their true scope – indicate the need for a philosophy that will recompense nature for the mishandling that it suffered in Kant and Fichte's systems, and set reason itself in harmony with nature, not by having reason renounce itself or become an insipid imitator of nature, but by reason recasting itself into nature out of its own inner strength (Hegel, 1977).

The Robbers (1781), merges the nihilism of the bastard Edmund with the diabolical hypocrisy of Richard III's rebellion against his natural destiny of ugliness: I have no small cause for being angry with Nature, and, by my honour! I will have amends. – Why did I not crawl first from my mother's womb? why not the only one? why has she heaped on me this burden of deformity? on me especially? just as if she had spawned me from her refuse. Why to me, in particular, this snub of the Laplander? These Negro lips? these Hottentot eyes? [. . .] No! no! I do her injustice – she bestowed inventive faculty, and sets us naked and helpless on the shore of this great ocean, the world – let those swim who can – the heavy may sink. To me, she gave naught else, and how to make the best use of my endowment is my present business. Men's natural rights are equal; the is met by claim effort by effort, and force by force – right is with the strongest – the limits of our power constitute our laws. (Schiller 1953: 18ff.)

What a frightful and odious spectacle is the man who delivers himself up to the tyranny of his violent and wrathful passions! . . . The man is transformed into a brute, or rather into a fiend and a

fury. Detestable sight! Who can behold him without horror? Fly from him; he is a disgrace to human nature. He is now only a fit companion for devils, and ought to be shunned and dreaded by human beings. (Fawcett, 1809)

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) had begun his career as a Sturm und Drang author, hailing Shakespeare enthusiastically in his early speech "Zum Scha'kespears Tag" ("On Shakespeare's Birthday," 1771), in which he claims that the new subjectivity, unencumbered by rules, can create characters that pulsate with the life of Nature: "Nature, Nature! nothing is so much Nature as Shakespeare's characters!" (Goethe 1986-, 1.2: 413).

II. CONCLUSION

Nature in literature especially in the movement of Romanticism is of great importance, If we examine the characteristics of the actual literature which called itself or was called 'romantic' all over the continent, 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. to a remarkable degree external nature – the landscape, together with its flora and fauna – became a persistent subject of poetry, and was described with accuracy and sensuous nuance unprecedented in earlier writers. It is a mistake, however, to describe the romantic poets as simply 'nature poets'. While many major poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge – and to a great extent by Shelley and Keats – set out from or return to an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape, the outer scene is not presented for its own sake but only as a stimulus for the poet to engage in the most characteristic human activity, that of thinking. A reader in the late eighteenth century would regard as 'perfectly normal a miscellany of . . . moral and philosophic poems inspired by physical nature, and lyrical pieces in a variety of kinds describing rural scenes . . . and simple life in the out-of-doors' (Mayo 1954: 490).

A sense of the health and integrity of the life of nature, in contrast with the depredations wrought by humanity, is exemplified in Lyrical Ballads by Wordsworth's 'Lines written in early spring'.

Nature thus can offer a 'resemblance' of the 'glorious faculty' of higher minds. Nature can herself intimate something beyond herself: the soul, the imagination of the whole. The 'herself' is important here. Nature is characterized as feminine. But the feminine is here associated with something that is not in itself of ultimate importance. Nature evidently does not know of the past; our spectral years are alien to her, and before her, we are vaguely conscious of our very selves—as only a dream of nature.

Numerous other critics have noted the fundamental calming effect which nature exercised on Wordsworth, and some drew parallels between the emotional sequence in many of the poems and the poet's own escape into nature from his disastrous experiences with Annette Vallon and the French Revolution.

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