

The Development and Reflection of Romanticism in John Keats' Poems

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Abstract: Romanticism is one of the most precious and culturally developing times throughout history, and John Keats was a representative figure in the romanticism movement. This study is aimed at the historical background of romanticism and the influences of John Keats. After close reading and research, the cause of romanticism is found: in the long term, the theory of enlightenment influenced people and led them to pursue freedom and human rights; in a short time, French Revolution, which happened in 1789, turned to be a failure, which causes people to search for a spiritual world to express their intense emotions. Because of the background, romanticism has unique features which convey intense feelings and connections with nature; usually, many literary devices are applied to make it exquisite. Also, in terms of form, blank verse poems became more diverse. His writing characteristics were well expressed by studying and analyzing John Keats' work, specifically Bright Star and the ode to the Nightingale. He used a lot of mythological metaphors and personification in his poem, which gives it a feeling of a fairytale. Because his poems illustrated the main ideas of romanticism, a lot of poetry and writers were influenced by him. In addition, his influence has expanded to the artistic field. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood considered him a spiritual leader, composing many works based on Keats's poems. Therefore, John Keats contributed uniquely to developing romantic literature and art.

Keywords: Romanticism, John Keats

1. Introduction

John Keats was born in London in 1795, an English romantic poet of the second generation. He left a short legend in the world and then died in 1821 at 26. As a representative poet of romanticism, Keats has so many pieces of works that are full of elegant and imaginative images and metaphors worth exploring and was appreciated by thousands of scholars. His age, romanticism, was a highly intellectual booming era with flourishing art, music and literature. After the revolutions, it was an era of emphasis on freedom and human rights, boosting cultural development, which is worth studying. Many researchers have studied the history of romantic literature and poets. Still, few have stood on the poet's perspective to discuss how his background influenced his work and how did his work embody the features of that specific era. Therefore, through the analysis of John Keats' poem, this study aims to explore the development of romanticism and use Keats's masterpieces, such as Bright star, Ode to A Nightingale and more, as examples to illustrate the features of romanticism.

How the writer, John Keats, promotes romanticism's development and his influences will also be discussed. The primary method of this research is through the close reading of romanticism poems studying the previous essay and researching the history of romanticism. This study could bring up a new understanding of romanticism.

2. Romanticism

2.1. Romanticism and Enlightenment

The Enlightenment period, which occurred during the eighteenth century and soon dominated the world, was a political and ideological movement that influenced people's beliefs and thoughts. Throughout history, it was the most prominent intellectual movement before romanticism. Therefore, it related to the appearance of romanticism to some extent. In a way, it prompts a collision between new and old ideas. Later in 1789, the failure of the French Revolution marked the end of the Enlightenment period. Then, a large amount of literature, art and music appeared, with the same ideal thought and highly praised emotion and spirit called romanticism. In the literary field, romanticism, as one of the main streams of study in the Western academic world, provided a foundation for developing Modernism and Post-modernism literature. To understand the background of the era Keats lived in, understanding romanticism and Enlightenment was essential.

The Enlightenment period was initiated in Britain in the 17th century, and France became the centre in the 18th century. According to Outram (2019), it is "the period rich with debates on the nature of man, truth and the place of God, with the international circulation of ideas, people and gold [1]." The movement was initiated by a group of scientists and philosophers who engaged in human rationalism and promoted reason. They emphasized the side-effect of laziness and cowardice and considered them the reason for being immature. One of its main aims is to let reason light the darkness of ignorance and liberate people's minds. It actively criticizes absolutism, religious ignorance and privilege and promotes freedom, equality and democracy. The developing stage of the Enlightenment was led by Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Montesquieu. People at that time were under the suppression of the church and authorities, and the idea of liberty of freedom released them from restraints. Many enlightenment thinkers opposed religious belief, especially Catholic churches, for the exploitation of people. Evelyn Beatrice Hall concludes Voltaire's thought with a famous sentence: I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. In her book *The Friends of Voltaire*, she used it to illustrate Voltaire's disapproval of absolute monarchy, opposing the Catholic church and his defence of freedom and right [2]. Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, was also a remarkable figure in this movement, making a speech suggesting that freedom was the most valuable and significant quality at the time. He then declared the importance of Enlightenment and summed up the era's motto: *Sapere Aude!* (Dare to be wise) Have the courage to use your own understanding [3]! Under this situation, people never questioned authority and social hierarchy. They would start to rethink the ideology and politics they were facing, at least doubting the king, which they never did before. Therefore, people at that time supported the ideas and joined the groups to rethink and finally start to rebel and launch a revolution.

The French Revolution started in 1789 and was one of the most important revolutions in Europe for setting a pioneer road for politics and seek for freedom and human rights. Absolute monarchy and feudalism were broken in a few years of rebellion. In 1789 when King Louis XVI wanted to impose a higher tax rate, people turned to no longer tolerant but started to protest on the streets; citizens were primarily inspired by the ideas of pursuing freedom and democracy. According to Deane, the French Revolution was based on the theory and interpretation of the Enlightenment in England, and the way people rose and overthrew King Louis XVI was the demonstration of its ideas

[4]. Since they were infuriated by the inequality and extravagant life Louis XVI and Queen had. As for people who fight for liberalism, insurrection is the most divine right given to revolt against the government when it abuses power. People started questioning the authority and absolute monarchs, seeking a way to break the walls between classes. Citizens challenge nobles and church privileges, and the separation of power Montesquieu replaces old ideas. As a result, ultimately, when people took over the Bastille fortress in 1789, French Revolution began. At a later stage of the revolution, chaos and violence dominate the tension. Robespierre, a politician from this time, was influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Montesquieu. People considered him to represent the poor and working class to get their rights back. He was the leader of the society of Jacobins (Société des Jacobins, Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité), one of the most potent club during the French Revolution, which came to power in 1793-1794. This period was known as the Reign of Terror. After Robespierre became president of the National Convention in 1794, he pursued a policy of terror and violence to consolidate his power. During this time, the use of the guillotine increased, and at least 40,000 people were killed. 300,000 Frenchmen and women were arrested [5]. Although people were seeking human rights and liberty, a consolidation of power can inevitably be violent and crush revolts. As a result, Robespierre was sent to the guillotine with some other members of society of Jacobins. Under turbulence, ideological and political conflicts were intense, triggering the development of romanticism.

Later in 1800, romanticism was widely spread due to the French Revolution. There are a few reasons for the risen of romanticist literature. First, based on Enlightenment, people tend to pursue a world with democracy and liberals. In other words, romanticism is the continuation of the freedom and rebellion of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. However, with the terror and consistent violation, the reality is full of disillusionment and despair. The literary world provides spiritual heaven for people who want to escape from the actual world. The idea of freedom largely influenced romantic writers, and this could embody in their works. Secondly, the information Enlightenment conveys is excessively rational since the pursuit of science and reason can be hard to accept for undereducated people. Therefore, romanticism seems to be more accessible, which emphasizes dramatic emotions and personal experiences. People are much easier to express their solid personal feelings. The seek for emotion turned away to reason and rational thoughts. Thus, romanticism reached its peak in the 19th century.

2.2. Features

Opposite to the Enlightenment, romanticism considers emotion a priority and a vital part of humanity. The features of romanticism are apparent. Landscape usually appears to evoke an intense personal feeling, not just only for being praised [6]. When romanticism embodies in terms of literature, there is always an emphasis on personal ideals. The poems usually focus on personal emotions and nature in terms of theme and content. The reason is that it is based on the French Revolution, and there is still an eagerness to pursue freedom. In addition, they focus on individuals and spirituality. Literary composing is no longer only for telling a story or expressing thoughts but can only convey an intense feeling. For example, *I Wander Lonely as a Cloud* by William Wordsworth, a representative poet of romanticism.

The opening few lines mention a series of nature: "cloud", "vales", "hill", "golden daffodils", "trees", "lake", and "breeze", and the poet connected them with his feelings and movements "lonely" "floats" "fluttering" and "dancing" [7]. He used skeuomorphism to compare himself with a creative cloud. In terms of techniques, literary devices such as personification, metaphors and similes are widely used, exploring more ways to convey thoughts. Some are subtle, and others are candid. In this way, poems connected emotions and nature well, so they turned out to be imaginative. As mentioned above, Coleridge adapted skeuomorphism to create a better atmosphere.

In this way, one can soon imagine a wandering cloud that creates a feeling of freedom and solitude. In terms of form, romanticism is a break from convention. Poems do not have to follow a rhyme scheme and can be written as a conversation. Romanticism mirrors the French revolutionaries' overturning of the early centuries' ideologies and ancient political systems, Which also proved romanticism has a huge connection to the French Revolution and focuses on its main theme-freedom of breaking. Before romanticism in the seventeenth century, classicist literature follows a strict pattern and rhyme of writing; they pursue the beauty of order. Also, due to political harmony, the government strictly censors literary production to consolidate power, which is why praise of the king or educational works become mainstream. Whereas romanticism appeared when liberty and freedom were set, and people were freer to express and be creative. Overall, romanticist poetry emphasizes emotion rather than reason, using various techniques rather than direct, breaking rhythmic rather than following.

3. John Keats' Influences

3.1. Analysis of the Poem and Keats' Promotion of Romanticism

Born in London in 1795, John Keats was an English Romantic poet of the second generation, along with Lord Byron and Percy Shelley. Keats's parents died when he was a teenager, leaving him with a shadow of grief. In October 1815, Keats enrolled at King's College London as a medical student at Guy's Hospital. After only one month, he became an assistant in the hospital while he continued writing as a hobby, but no one ever thought this could be his career. Later, Keats quit the hospital to concentrate on writing. When his brother died from tuberculosis in 1818, he moved to his friend's house and fell in love with Fanny Brawne. However, the talented and sentimental poet was short-lived; he passed away after three years, aged 26. He published his first poetry collection in 1817 but received aggressive and strict comments in the magazine. His most famous piece, *The Ode of Nightingale*, was written after meeting Fanny Brawne and the *Bright Star*. In the following few years, he was haunted by financial and physical troubles but created masterpieces, such as *To Autumn*. His romantic and fantastical writing style seems to pursue ideal life in his misfortune life. His fame soon increased after his death.

He wrote his first mature poem, on first looking into Chapman's Homer, in 1816, after reading George Chapman's translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Edmund Spenser also influenced Keats with his *Faerie Queene*, which was published in the 1590s, was an epic poem in which he created an imaginative and appealing world. *The Eve of St. Agnes* was a romantic, lyrical poem composed of Spenserian stanzas by Keats Early in 1814. Keats also had a poem, *Imitation of Spenser*, using Spenserian stanzas. He started to use poetic language to create a picturesque that was full of gentleness at his early stage of writing. *The Bright Star* was not the most famous poem in all of Keats' work, but it gently moved people. When John Keats wrote the poem *The Bright Star* in 1819, he knew that he was dying from tuberculosis. The poem became his swan song, giving it a tragic tinge. Most scholars believed that he wrote this to his lover, Fanny Brawne, while some thought it was written before the meeting. The poem is written in a sonnet form, followed by ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyming scheme. The writer used a second-person perspective in the first eight lines, talking to a star. The tone was devotional, creating an image of the poet lying on the ground, gently and lovingly watching the star:

"Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,"

There are uses of personification and simile. In line 3, the writer ascribes human behaviour to a star which makes the star an observer of the world, hung aloft in the sky, shining forever. It creates an image that the author is lying under the cover of night and stars at the vast river of stars. The image should be astonishingly beautiful. However, there is a feeling of solitude and fear because of the writer's diction; more specifically, Keats used words such as "eternal", "nature's patient", and "sleepless Eremite", creating a peaceful tone and making it obscure. Human beings are always full of fear and esteem for unknowns and huge things. In this case, it is a star hanging in the sky. Throughout the poem, the star represents the eternity of love and life, the way he creates the atmosphere because that eternity is something that mortal beings on earth would naturally fear. Still, the more people fear and respect, the more Keats would be steadfast. Therefore, his love seems to be permanent and more precious.

"The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors — "

The following four lines continue on stars to describe the scenes it sees from the star's perspective. It seems that the star also represents a character of God, watching every single thing on earth with kindness. The writer describes snow as a "new soft-fallen mask". The poem immediately becomes more mysterious and obscure. In addition, these four lines are full of assonance, with the repetition of "o", which sounds like gentle breath, making the tone more gentle and contrasting with the last lines. From line 9, the style suddenly becomes very emotional, and the subject becomes his lover.

"No—yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel its soft fall forever and swell,
Awake forever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death [8]."

The use of Caesura added more punctuation to this poem, such as in line 9. Therefore, it might be a signal of sudden change. Assonance and alliteration were also used in lines 10 and 11, creating a feeling of up and down, reflected in line 11, as the tone "fall and swell", making readers feel the same way. In these lines, the author also describes eternity, the eternity of love between a couple. Words he used are solid and steadfast. "still," "to feel for ever", "awake for ever", "still to hear" and "live ever" consistently emphasized the state of being eternal. The last line is such a powerful statement by the poet that he would rather die if he failed to pursue true love, which also reflects the virtue he demands to be steadfast. This poem demonstrates the features of romanticism: its content is usually about personal feelings and connection to nature. In this poem, John Keats expresses a strong emotion of love and despair and connects them to a star. In terms of literary devices, there are personification, similes, metaphors, and so on to help create a fantastic scene.

John Keats' one of the most well-known poems, *Ode to a Nightingale*, was also creative and inspirational, which was a glorification and eulogy of life and nature. It was written when Keats heard a nightingale sing, and he felt melancholy. There are eight stanzas, and each contains ten lines. One can see the features of romanticism, which express authors' emotions by connecting them with nature. In the first two stanzas, there are many uses of mythological metaphors in the poem, such as "Leth-wards", "Dryad", "Flora", and "Hippocrene." His diction was also like a fairy tale, which was also a way to add imaginative thoughts and increase the space for readers to imagine. According to Cru(2013), one of Keats' outstanding qualities was his use of fantastic and fairytale qualities. The reason why he is remembered is that his productions are full of imaginary thought and his unique

fantasy style. He might not be the most revolutionary and passionate as the rest of the Romantic poets, but he is the most poetic one, with the colors of nature and melody. In the poem, Bright Star, within only fourteen lines, many metaphors have been used, which not only embodies the deep love of the theme but also embody romantic features [9].

3.2. Other Influences

John Keats influenced not only the romanticist literature circle but also paintings in the 19 century--the Pre-Raphaelites was his admirer. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was initiated in 1848 in London, and only a few people, John Everett Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Holman Hunt, attended the first meeting. Painter William Holman Hunt was painting based on John Keats' poem, The Eve of St. Agnes. Since then, they started an idea to connect art with romantic lyrics. They created many paintings with Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who considered Keats as a spiritual leader and ideological founder of the Brotherhood: between 1844 to 1846, the brotherhood read a large number of Keats' verses and tried to visualize them; their paintings are full of details and light colours, conveying an idea of freedom and nature [10]. Therefore, Keats' influences are broad.

4. Conclusion

Romanticism is a glimmering star in the literature world. The rise of romanticism was because of the French Revolution, and its ideology greatly influenced millions of writers. The fundamental thesis of the French Revolution derived from the enlightenment, known as "the age of reason" romanticism has reformed and continued its ideas. It is an appeal to emotion and concern for typical human nature that has been widely circulated. John Keats, a great romantic poet, devoted his passion and personal affection to his poems. The image he created is elegant, beautiful and full of intense individual subjectivity, making them read like a fairytale, which is rare in previous classicism poems. That is why Keats's poems are representative works of romanticism and last for a long time. Keats also significantly contributed to romanticism later in art and literature.

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