

The Value of Night in English Poetry of The Romantic Period (1757-1822)

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ABSTRACT

This study has attempted to examine the value of night in English poetry of the Romantic period (1757–1822). It has aimed to establish how the writers of English poetry of the Romantic period highlight the value of night and images of nature involved in creating this value, while also realising the importance of night in life, according to the poems examined in this study. Three poems of the English poetry of the Romantic period (1757–1822), were used as data for the current study. The poems were analysed quantitatively – the occurrence of the expressions, words and phrases highlighting the value of night were recorded. Results showed that the poets highlight the value of night as an image of nature. Besides, the poets believe that night is a sign of beauty and tranquillity in human life.

Key words: Romantic Period, Romantic Poetry, Romanticism Studies, Night in Poetry

INTRODUCTION

Poetry is considered to be a rich source of intellectual, emotional and imaginative aspects in human life. It is deemed to be a universal language which all nations and communities are familiar with. In addition to, poetry functions to be an effective mechanism that depicts life with its pleasure and depression, bustle and sluggishness. It is written to celebrate joyful moments, achievements and victory, to mourn, to praise, to encourage, to express emotions and feelings, to criticize, and to thank, as well. Accordingly, studying poetry is regarded as a vital issue which sheds light upon the views and ideas shaped by poets – these views and ideas function as lessons that are communicated through poetry Watson (1991), reports that Shelly claimed that poets were unacknowledged legislators of the world; indicating that poets enact social and conventional laws which may help communities and be their guide. Such studies enable the audience, whether instructors, researchers or students, to gain better understanding and thorough insight so that they can disclose the obscurity of poetry and overcome its difficulty; because poetry is thought to be intricate and vague. Stephen (1984), argues that poetry can be obscure and hard to understand; he considers it as often the most difficult of the three literary modes or genres. Such views are regarded to be a direct call for researchers and scholars in order to contribute to conducting various studies in this essential discipline; so as to create a room for different perspectives, communication, comments, visions and ideas.

The English poetry of the Romantic period has emphasised the appreciation of nature as one of the most important factors which shape man's life. Therefore, nature is of crucial

importance that is to be focused when studying English poetry of the Romantic period. Romantic poets draw attention to the role of nature in all aspects of human life and its role in educating man and arousing feelings and emotions. These poets weave a world of charm by describing nature with all its figures, whether trees, flowers, mountains, rivers, the sky, the moon, the sun, stars, rain, clouds, morning, day, sunrise, sunset, etc.

One of these figures which the Romantic poets emphasise is night, which has more to yield such as beauty, dreams and calm. This study will be centralised on the value of night in the poetry of William Blake, William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley who are regarded as great poets of English poetry of the Romantic period (1757-1822)

Statement of the Problem

Poetry is a paramount literary genre which has more to express and offer issues that arouse human beings emotion and sensibility. Among other genres of literature, it gains popularity among many audiences, however, it is thought to be the most difficult and vague type of literary genres which is regarded to be one of the problems that encounter audiences.. This is due to the distinguished and special language used in writing poetry. The language of poetry, of course, violates linguistics rules at all levels, whether the lexical, syntactic, or morphological levels. Furthermore, poetry has two levels of meaning; surface and implied or deep meanings. Therefore, studying poetry intends to solve the problems of vagueness and difficulties experienced by those who are interested in poetry, whether they are researchers, instructors,

students or any other people enjoy reading it. Consequently, studying poetry tends to be more challenging and exciting for the sake of enjoying audiences. Moreover, such a study illuminates the hidden and hazy values that are expressed in poetry, for instance beauty, love, happiness, fear, nature and loyalty. On the basis of this idea, this study attempts to examine the 'value of night in English poetry of the Romantic period (1757–1822)'. By doing so, it seeks to contribute to facilitating those problems of difficulty and vagueness as well as gaining a better understanding and interpretation of poetry. The study also, attempts to illustrate how the poets of the Romantic periods portray the value of night and reflect its importance not only in human's life; but also in the lives of other living beings.

Aims of the Study

This study intends to achieve the following aims:

1. To show how English poets of the Romantic period highlight the value of night and images of nature involved in creating this value.
2. To realise the importance of night in man's life, according to the poems examined in the current study.

Significance of the Study

This study attempts to have a hand in the exploration of more concepts and ideas presented by poetry, as poetry is a rich field which has more to offer. In addition, it tries to solve the problems of the obscurity and difficulty of interpreting and comprehending poetry. Moreover, it may be of great value to those who are concerned with poetry, such as critics, instructors, researchers and students. Besides, it draws attention to the significance of nature for the survival of human beings and other living beings. Of course, nature functions as a source that provides all living beings with food and drink. Thus, the study emphasizes an essential issue that many studies are conducted nowadays in order to discuss nature and how to protect it from destruction. Moreover, to enrich the study of poetry, because it is less examined and investigated by researchers; compared to the immense studies conducted on other disciplines. Importantly, such a study creates opportunities for discussion and communicating various ideas and visions among researchers and scholars.

Research Questions

1. How do the Romantic poets highlight the value of night as an image of nature?
2. What is the Romantic poets' view with regard to the role of night in human life?

Research Hypotheses

To find answers to the questions above, the hypotheses below have been made:

1. The Romantic poets highlight the value of night as an image of nature.

2. The Romantic poets believe that night is a sign of beauty and tranquillity in human life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Poetry is capable of offering more ideas and thoughts that can impress people life in several aspects. Thus, it paves the way for a new approach to critical thinking, interpreting and understanding of the messages that poets intend to convey through their poetry. Moreover, it has the capability of bringing an atmosphere of pleasure into human life and mesmerizing them. Blamires (1984), clarifies that Wordsworth considers poetry as the breath and spirit of knowledge. This claim is achieved by the various lessons that poetry yields; including social, humanitarian aesthetic and political issues. Therefore, a poet is considered as someone who represents a society by expressing its feelings, needs and views, as well as being a society's teacher and guide. Watson (1992), argues that the poets of the Romantic period led a movement of change in terms of changing humans' feelings and their ideas and perspectives about their society and the natural world around them. The Romantic period came into existence as a revolt against the convention that dominated before it. Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelly and Keats emphasise nature and appreciate its vital role in shaping man and educating him. They highlight the mutual communication between man and nature, and the impact it has on his life. So, man realizes the essential role of nature in his life as a source of health, food, drink and a source of speculation. Man learns that he should be a constructive element that keeps nature from destruction and loss. Matters and Jones (2000), argue that Romantic poetry regards man's involvement with the natural world, so Romantic poets concentrate on describing nature with all its charm, dignity and beauty. Thornley and Roberts (1984), believe that Wordsworth had a distinguished ability which enabled him to encapsulate ordinary things with fascination and attraction. Various figures of nature have been described in Romantic poems, such as rivers, mountains, birds, stars, the moon, the sun, the sky, clouds, rain and flowers. Abd Allah (2019) investigated the use of nature as a vehicle to express thoughts in the English poetry of the Romantic period. He aimed to explain the role of nature as a dominant factor in inspiring poets so as to express different thoughts. He also aimed to show how the Romantic poets appreciate nature, love and social life. He selected six poems from English poetry of the Romantic period. The results showed that various figures of nature were used by the poets to express their thoughts. Thus, nature forms the spine bone of constructing English poetry of the Romantic period.

Critics claim that the six most well-known Romantic poets are:

1. William Blake (1757–1827)
2. William Wordsworth (1770–1850)
3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1843)
4. Lord Byron (1788–1824)
5. Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)
6. John Keats (1795–1821)

These poets contributed a lot to the Romanticism movement which originated in Europe towards the end of the 18th century. This period focused on the free expression of the individual, appreciating nature and human social life. Their poetry was devoted to make the world a better place for life which offers shelter, peace, comfort and joy for human beings. In general, the period of romanticism was characterised by imagination, intuition, idealism and inspiration.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Three poems, from the English poetry of the Romantic period (1757-1822), were collected to function as data for the current study. The poems are considered to be samples of this period. These poems were written by the Romantic poets William Blake, William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Procedures

In order to fulfil the objectives of this study, the three poems selected for the study were investigated and analysed; the poems are made to be equal in terms of length. The expressions, words and phrases that indicate the value of night in the examined poems, were focused and recorded, as well as the words and phrases that show the role of night in human beings life.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data will be displayed in tables, which will show the distribution and frequency of the words and phrases that highlight the value and charm of night which appear in the examined poems. Also, they will show the expressions, words and phrases that show the importance of night in human life.

DISCUSSION

This section is devoted to discuss the value of night highlighted in the poems selected for this study.

'Night' by William Blake

In this poem, Blake describes the exquisite scene of night. He portrays the value and the magnificence of night which is shaped by various fascinating figures of nature. By doing so, he draws the attention to the beautiful sight of the descending

sun, as an indication of the upcoming of the fairness of night. He also points to the moon as another figure of nature, which looks like flowers. Blake personifies the moon; saying that it smiles to celebrate the glorified time of night which is expected to come soon so as to spread its pleasant and attractive sight on the universe. In addition to, the poet decorates the image of night by stating that the skies are kept silent for the sake of enjoying the beauty of night with absolute attention and without any disturbance or distraction. Also, Blake illustrates the important role of night in man's life by saying that night is the time for joy and blessing. Likewise, he shows that night is regarded as the time for protection; not only for man but also for animals. This protection involves children, birds and lambs.. The process of protection is managed by angles and animals such as lions. So, night functions as a factor that provides carefulness for innocent and friendly living beings. Furthermore, night is supposed to be a time for sleeping and tranquillity which are essential elements for human beings health.

The sun descending in the west.
The evening star does shine.
The birds are silent in their nest,
And I must seek for mine,
The moon like a flower,
In heavens high bower;
With silent delight,
Sits and smiles on the night.

Farewell, green fields and happy groves,
Where flocks have took delight;
Where lambs have nibbled, silent moves
The feet of angels bright;
Unseen they pour blessing,
And joy without ceasing,
On each bud and blossom,
And each sleeping bosom.

They look in every thoughtless nest
Where birds are covered warm;
They visit caves of every beast,
To keep them all from harm;
If they see any weeping.
That should have been sleeping
They pour sleep on their head
And sit down by their bed.

When wolves and tygers howl for prey
They pitying stand and weep;
Seeking to drive their thirst away,
And keep them from the sheep.
But if they rush dreadful;
The angels most heedful,
Receive each mild spirit.
New worlds to inherit.

And there the lions ruddy eyes,
Shall flow with tears of gold;
And pitying the tender cries,

Table 1. Distribution of words expressing the value of night and its importance in life; in 'Night' by William Blake

Poem	Words expressing value	Importance of night in life
'Night' by William Blake	the sun descending,	offering blessing, joy,
	the moon like a flower,	sleeping and
	the evening, star shines	protection for living being

And walking round the fold:
Saying: wrath by his meekness
And by his health, sickness.
Is driven away,
From our immortal day.

And now beside thee, bleating lamb.
I can lie down and sleep;
Or think on him who bore thy name.
Graze after thee and weep.
For wash'd in lifes river.
My bright mane for ever.
Shall shine like the gold,
As I guard o'er the fold

‘A Night-Piece’ by William Wordsworth

Wordsworth depicts and reflects the magnificence of night in his poem ‘A Night-Piece’. He describes the figures of nature which participate in that carnival of the beauty of the night. He says that the moon appears to be sharp and bright; moving and sailing through the sky. The twinkling stars follow the moon wherever it goes and moves, shaping a very nice and appealing portrait. The sky is described as a vault that can be seen as a crown which smartens night. So the sky is deemed to be the king of this glorious time. The poet also describes the sounds of winds moving and shaking the branches of the trees during night, creating a musical tune, as if it were a concert celebrating this joyful and lovely time. Besides, the poet displays that the clouds are whitened by the luminous moon; which is another aspect to portray this colourful image of night. The white colour of the clouds, caused by the moon, offers night another characteristic which is peace. So, night status is extended to be the time for peace and security. Wordsworth adds up, that night is a useful factor for humans, such as travellers, by yielding them pleasure and enjoyment; because they are attracted by the charming sight during their journeys. Moreover, at night, human minds are stabilized in tranquillity, so it is a time of relaxation, purification and creative ideas. Therefore, the poem is regarded as a direct invitation for people to enjoy night that weaves a world of fascination and pleasure.

—The sky is overcast
With a continuous cloud of texture close,
Heavy and wan, all whitened by the Moon,
Which through that veil is indistinctly seen,
A dull, contracted circle, yielding light

Table 2. Distribution of words expressing the value of night and its importance in life in ‘Night-Piece’ by William Wordsworth

Poem	Words expressing value	Importance of night in life
‘Night-Piece’ by William Wordsworth	the sky as a vault, continuous clouds of texture, the moon yielding light	present pleasure for travelers, minds are stabilized in tranquility

So feebly spread that not a shadow falls,
Chequering the ground, from rock, plant, tree, or tower.
At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
Startles the pensive traveller as he treads
His lonesome path, with unobserving eye
Bent earthwards; he looks up—the clouds are split
Asunder,—and above his head he sees
The clear moon, and the glory of the heavens.
There, in a black blue vault she sails along,
Followed by multitudes of stars, that, small
And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
Drive as she drives;—how fast they wheel away,
Yet vanish not!—the wind is in the tree,
But they are silent;—still they roll along
Immeasurably distant;—and the vault,
Built round by those white clouds, enormous clouds,
Still deepens its unfathomable depth.
At length the Vision closes; and the mind,
Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.

‘To Night’ by Percy Bysshe Shelley

In his poem ‘To Night’, Shelley intends to express his eagerness and love to night. He considers night as a human being dressing in a grey cloak. He says that the stars decorate that grey cloak, covering night and creating an attractive scene. Furthermore, he believes that night is a belle with long, black hair, as a sign of beauty. The poet is asking beautiful lady to come and cover the day with her hair to pave the way for night to come and stay for long. He imagines that night is more charming than the day time which lingers like an unloved guest. The appearance of night is connected with other beautiful features of nature such as waves, caves, sea, stars and land. The poet also draws the attention to the fact that night offers calm, sleeping and comfort. So, it functions as a drug which relieves pains, tension, depression and sickness. Shelley asks man to utilize the precious moments of night and the gifts that it offers.

Swiftly walk o’er the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where, all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—

Table 3. Distribution of words expressing the value of night and its importance in life in ‘To Night’ by Percy Shelly

Poem	Words expressing value	Importance of night in life
‘To Night’ by Percy Bysshe Shelly	sea, land, the sun riding high wave, the sky dressing in grey cloak	weaving dreams for humans, offering a sleeping, calm and comfort

Swift be thy flight!
 Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,
 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 sighed for thee;
 When light rode high, and the dew was gone,
 And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,
 And the weary Day turned to his rest,
 Lingered like an unloved guest.
 I sighed for thee.
 Thy brother Death came, and cried,
 Wouldst thou me?
 Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,
 Murmured 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!

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

This study seeks to investigate the value of night in English poetry of the Romantic period (1757-1822). Therefore, it is conducted in order to add additional efforts to studies carried out on poetry which aim to find unexplored ideas introduced in various poems, in general and the romantic poetry, in particular. By doing so, the current study has attempted to achieve the following aims:

1. To show how English poets of the Romantic period highlight the value of night and images of nature involved in creating this value.
2. To realise the importance of night in man's life, according to the poems examined in the current study.

It is striking that nature is the major theme of English poetry of the Romantic period is nature. It is a dominant and tangible factor that is present in the romantic poetry; through which poets intend to convey messages that concern human

life. Night, of course, is one of nature figures that has a vital role to play in human life.

By investigating the value of 'night' in English poetry of the Romantic period (1757–1822), the study has intended to list every occurrence of the expressions, phrases and words in the poems examined in this study. Accordingly, these expressions, phrases and words used in the investigated poems, have been recorded. The poems under investigation have been selected because they are regarded as samples of English poetry of the Romantic period (1757-1822). Of course, these poems shape an example of appreciating nature which is known to be the main field that the poets of the Romantic period have focused and given a special attention.

Tables 1, 2 and 3 show that all the poets highlight the value of the night and the images of nature involved in this value. They also show the importance of night in life; thus, appreciating nature and its role in life.

Based on the results, the study has recorded the following findings:

1. The poets highlight the value of the night as an image of nature. This finding answers question 1 in the questions of the current study.
2. The poets believe that night is a sign of beauty and tranquility in human life. This finding answers question 2 in the questions of this study.

RECOMMENDATION

The recommendation is based on the following suggestions for future research:

1. It is valuable to study other aspects of English poetry of the Romantic period (1757–1822) such as appreciating society and the individual.
2. It is worthwhile to conduct studies on other literary genres of the Romantic period other than poetry.

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