



Echoes of Melancholy: A critical exploration of the Despair and Abandonment within early 19th Century English Poets

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DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.1.202](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.1.202)



Article info

Article Received: 31/01/2025
Article Accepted: 18/03/2025
Published online: 23/03/2025

Abstract

The romantic age Literature, along with the period that had immediately preceded it, was unfurled into a scathing expression, one that was marked by a certain revolt against the prevalent sensibility in favour of the natural senses by the likes of Wordsworth and Coleridge, as the eventual consequence of a period that had been engrossed in what the then romantics would have referred to as an irrational admiration for the classics. The prime concern for the poets of Romanticism was to never be scrupulous about the concerns that had been deluging the minds of other writers concomitant to them in the first place. Their explorations of the unbridled emotions of the human mind, other than exhibiting the naturalistic propensity of a newfound eloquence also brought forth to the attention of others, a sense of dejection and desolation that continued to reverberate the sanctums of literary figures for a significant time in the history and showed no signs of dissipation even going further either with an egalitarian conception of the Victorians or the defiled dystopia of the Modernists. Despite the immense joy and pleasure they had experienced through their predilection of an unrestrained lexicon, their poetry made known the much-concealed morbidity which their minds were possessed with, and even their preoccupation with the romantic ideals that were supposed to be enrapturing couldn't assuage the gloom they had found themselves to be stranded on. The association of a sense of freedom divorced from the rationality of the neoclassical, with the same dread of misery that had intimidated even the rationalists, reveals a concern worthy of a sincere discourse about human nature and its inveterate resorts to despair.

Keywords: Romantics, Existentialism, Wordsworth, Melancholy.

Introduction

The renown concerned with the age of Romanticism was cemented wholly upon the unrestrained and natural expression of the thoughts in accordance with one's own inherent composition, accompanied with a disregard for a disposition that was acclimated to conform to the solemn and more often than not considered sacrosanct ideals of the classicists. But their entitlement with regards to the freedom of their expression had kicked off initially with an adherence to being dismissive about the formal style of writing that had ensued with the writers of the neoclassical era. "Works of imagination should be written in very plain language; the more purely imaginative they are the more necessary it is to be plain". (Samuel Taylor Coleridge). The escape from the confines of the syntactic formality was closely followed by a simultaneous escape from the reason that the romantics and their contemporaries disavowed for a discerning ardor of desires and wants common to all. When their feelings could no longer be constricted with the pedantry that had until now been imposed upon them, the inexorable revelation was an unprecedented void which they strove to suffuse through their evocative expressions of freedom but their contrivances of resolving the almost insurmountable conflict pertaining to the existence of the being, evidently turned out to be in vain, as much as they had hoped for the contrary, not much distinct from the hackneyed abeyance the rationalists had encountered not long ago. The sense of aloofness and abandonment expressed in their poetic works can directly be interpreted as having been resulted of their debacle at not being competent enough to bring the reality of the existence they dwelled upon so oftenly through the agency of their unbridled emotions, to any degree of comprehension. It's rather paradoxical at the first instance to be thinking about the writers of an age that's distinctive of other ages solely by the virtue of it denoting bliss and ecstasy, with a sense of dejection, but as it turns out, the

excursions into the depths of human emotions albeit devoid of rationality results into the same bottomless perdition of obscurity with the rationalists and empiricists being its inhabitants.

Philosophical Insolvency of the Romantics

The romantic ideals though having stemmed from mere emotions that aren't anything but ephemeral, were touted with some semblance of logical thought that could in hindsight be deemed as a philosophical epiphany, however abrupt it may have been. "For oft, when on my Couch I lie, In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude' are from". (Wordsworth) His preoccupation with solitude and eventual subjugation of his thoughts by an apparent introspection, must be of one, piquing his inquisition further about the ontological status of the being. Much of the romantic age poetry is supposed to be the means of escape for those who couldn't concede to the logical skepticism of both the Renaissance and the Enlightenment age from the dejection and gloom it had brought and in this very approach with their efforts being contingent upon the faculty of hunch as opposed to the faculty of rational thought, there existed a somewhat philosophical thought which was no more philosophical than the consensual conviction of repudiating the rational thought that antecedes the triumph of caprice. "Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most must mourn the deepest o'er the fatal truth, the Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life". (Gordon) While the romantic poets must not have been oblivious of the immanent obscurity of existence, their escape from reason with them seeking a complacent haven had them end up getting marooned on an irreconcilable quandary, At any rate they were unanimous about eschewing from adhering to any prevalent philosophical thought and had left themselves solely to their faculty of imagination which to them was the quintessence of their Philosophy. "the great instrument of moral good is the the imagination". (Percy Bysshe Shelley) To what

extent would their imagination which in itself is propelled through the whims and desires of the corporeal being, be conducive to the greater good is debatable as an abandonment of the faculty of reason is closely followed by the beastly propensities that seek no one's interests but its own. Their obsession with Nature is nothing but a testament of the same animalistic spirit of decay that the Modernists had been critical of, a conformity to nature notwithstanding the plain language with which it has been expressed, is an assertion of perpetuating the same bestiality that humans have forsaken in favour of an intellectual thought distinct from other animals in migrating afar from the woods. "Sweet is the lore which nature brings; Our meddling intellect Misshapes the beauteous forms of things— We murder to dissect". (Wordsworth). With such a conviction there's barely anything philosophical but despite the seemingly contradictory state between the imagination and Philosophy, the romantic writers have attempted earnestly to dress their bouts of passion and despair as something arcane to be had when it's actually a spontaneous slippery slope warranting no conscious effort other than relying on entropy unlike any serious consideration. "Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind, That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep, Haunted for ever by the eternal mind". (William 1770-1850 Wordsworth and Mosher).

Condemned to Freedom

The freedom that they readily professed for, was not to be the one that would bring them the panacea for the existential abyss they had been trying to outrun through their explorations of the embodied emotions but as much as they had desired to conceal the apparitions of an obscured existence, they couldn't bring themselves anymore to perpetuating the charade of an innocuous and enrapturing expression, as had been thought of romantics, despite the best of their efforts.

I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, and the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man... (Wordsworth).

The Romantics seldom had the luxury of probing within their minds about the fundamental questions of existence that had pestered the philosophers and thinkers since time immemorial, instead they had been intent on allowing the feeling to take it upon itself to furnish them with the subjective meanings to which they would then obsequiously concur but in this instance it seems like the writer can't help but concede the intimidation of the faculty of its thought that's now, to its reluctance, making the existential dread more perceptible than ever before. Their failures with regards to seeking a meaningful truth hadn't been anything not witnessed before, for it was the only conscious endeavour that had been doomed since its inception not just with the romantics but even with their predecessors. "Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark, And has the nature of infinity." (Wordsworth). A capitulation before the invincible forces that are incomprehensible, as opposing to the motifs of a Romantic thought it might have been, remained the only choice for them just like others before, and such a poignant expression of the admittance of defeat was more profoundly expressed in the works of Pre Romantics. "For who to dumb Forgetfulness a prey, This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd, Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day, Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?" (Gray). Despite their conformity to the belief system of their own passions and desires, they had not been so credulous in being led to the theological expediency for their philosophical consolations as even a deliberate withdrawal from the faculty of reason couldn't restrain them from impugning the dogmatic Religious authority.

"There is something pagan in me that I cannot shake off. In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything." ("A Quote by Lord Byron"). This denial of what Kierkegaard would later go on referring to as a Leap of Faith, secures the susceptibility of their descent into an almost irredeemable Slough of Despond where unlike the rationalists, their sense of attained absolute freedom is as tormenting as it can get because of a want of a comforting recourse, which doesn't require any testament other than the chronic depressive states that the prominent romantics such as Wordsworth and Keats had languished in throughout their lives.

Perils of an Introspective Gloom

The melancholic states of Romantic writers to a great extent can be attributed to the erroneous inclination of beings to not be sentient in the present moment, rather being absorbed in the remorseful past and simultaneously fretting about the indefiniteness of what's to be had ahead. This particular expression is not exclusive to Romantics alone but is a recurrent affirmation of the miserable status of beings, of which the melancholic evocations brought out by Literature happen to be an indictment. "We poets in our youth begin in gladness but there of come in the end, despondency and Madness". (Wordsworth) Poet's intonation is reminiscent of a certain nostalgia and of a blissful past that he admittedly regrets to have lost the possession of, because of being coerced into moving ahead by the impending hour. The longing for past accompanied by an anticipation of future, robs them of the very faculty of imaginative dwelling in present that they had so resolutely insisted upon, as their minds are fixated upon hopes and unfulfilled desires even. "The child is father of the man; And I could wish my days to be Bound each to each by natural piety". (Wordsworth). Specifically for the case of Wordsworth his state of being eviscerated from an innocent youth and eventually having been abandoned at the precipice of an existential introspection is what he despised the most, this imminent plunge however hopeless recovering from that might

have been, was the primary cause of his efforts leading to an unambiguous admiration of the ignorant yet blissful disposition of children. As much as they had been intent on eschewing from the rationality of the Enlightenment thinkers, they couldn't after all purge themselves of the dejected meditation on the mortality of the being, as their writings transpired of emotions being beset with the trepidations of the inexorable doom which unfortunately for them couldn't be reconciled with their passions of the corporeal world. "As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral! When old age shall this generation waste, Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe". (Keats) His desperate attempts at evading the ineluctable, is evident with his immortalising inanimate depictions of a world long gone after having been consumed by the fangs of time. There couldn't have been anything more contradictory than the Romantics who had been deemed as the usherers of the redemptory thought of the French Revolution, expressing a sense of incarceration by the forces beyond their will.

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should
come near (Percy Bysshe Shelley).

The poet himself seems to be acknowledging his subjugation by certain elements that the existence is fraught of, that stifle his endeavours of seeking a repose amidst the tranquil existence, thus affirming that despite the proponents of an emancipating freedom they and their contemporaries had been, even for them the idea of an absolute freedom was no more than a chimera just yet. Their ponderance on things of future and particularly on the events that were the consequence of obscured forces, was the prime reason for their prolonged misery. "I cry your mercy, pity, love! aye, love! Merciful love that tantalizes not". (Keats) These expressions have barely anything concerned with either freedom or redemption in them, if

anything they are evocative of the miserable demeanours that the romantic age writers ingeniously intended to disguise as a freedom of thought and expression when in reality, their inherent freedom had already been bartered for a sensual anticipation which to their disbelief, brought them more despondence than what they already had initially.

Conclusion

The works of the authors of the romantic age had the common theme of Dejection and an alienation from the society and other people who had been around them with much of their afflictions could be seen as having resulted directly from their non conformity to the prevalent notions of Literary thought that had been existent in the epoch followed by the French Revolution. Their implorations of embracing a novel yet rebellious thought of freedom was not entirely sincere with respect to their conscious denial of a dialectical thought that they had so unrelentingly abhorred, with the cognitive dissonance between their unexplored and rather unintelligible passions and the inadvertent meditation upon the existential dread being the fatal repercussion of such insouciance. Furthermore, the principal flaw of beings concerned with their preoccupation with the ambiguity of Future has been revealed as a hallmark of Romantic poetry, as writers like Wordsworth and Coleridge plumbed the depths of their own psyches in search of meaning and connection. Through their works, we have glimpsed the darker aspects of the human experience, where despair and abandonment lurk in the shadows. This exploration of despair in early 19th-century English poetry has underscored the profound sense of disillusionment and existential unease that defined the Romantic era. As we reflect on the echoes of melancholy that continue to resonate through literature and art today, we are reminded of the enduring power of poetry to capture the complexities and contradictions of the human condition.

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