

"Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth as a Romantic Poem

Sushanto Basak

Assistant Teacher, Mahendrapur High School (HS)

Abstract

This article describes why the poem "Tintern Abbey" by William Wordsworth is called a romantic poem. The poem was included in the "Lyrical Ballads", a joint production of Wordsworth and Coleridge. The publication is "Lyrical Ballads" is taken by many as the beginning of Romanticism in English Literature. But, the inclusion is not a proof of the poem being called a romantic poem. This article justifies the claim of "Tintern Abbey" as a romantic poem.

Keywords: Tintern Abbey, Poem

Introduction

The poem "Tintern Abbey" appeared in the "Lyrical Ballads", published jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798. The publication of "Lyrical Ballads" is taken as the beginning of romantic periods by many. So the inclusion of "Tintern Abbey" in the "Lyrical Ballads" is a proof of its being a romantic poem. But to just it as a romantic poem, we have to see which characteristics of a romantic poem are found in this poem. The following section will show the characteristics that justify the poem as a romantic one.

Romanticism

Romanticism is a literary concept and it is very difficult to define a literary concept. In spite of this various writers has defined romanticism differently. We can say, it an extraordinary flight of mind and imagination in literary or artistic expression. It marks a strong protest against the distance of classicism. It's sole moto is freedom- freedom from conventions, freedom from every form of restrictions, freedom of mind and imagination etc. We can say a literary piece a romantic one if we find certain characteristics, such as humanism, return to nature, mysticism, interest in the past, subjectivity, escapism, melancholy note etc.

Let's see which characteristics mentioned above are found in the poem "Tintern Abbey"-

Jean Jacques Rousseau is called the father of romanticism. Rousseauism is based on two fold concepts- man's worth and dignity as man and man's natural relationship with nature. Rousseau's humanism has great inspiring affect on the romanticists, so their approach to man differs greatly from the writers of the previous age, like Dryden, Pope etc. Romanticists are found to deal with human life only with all its essential features, like simplicity, purity, liberty etc. In the poem "Tintern Abbey", we find Wordsworth's greater humanism. The poem beer evidence of his deeper humanism, a greater

understanding of life's mystery, a more deeper realization of the inner meaning of things. His humanism is evident in his lines -

the still l sad music of humanity

Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power

To chasten and subdue.

Another important characteristics of romantic literature is its return to nature. To the romanticists, nature does not only mean the beautiful sights and sounds of nature but also elemental simplicity of life. Romanticists turned to nature for its material- not only to its external beauty, but also to the simple lives of cottagers, hill dwellers, peasants who live far away from the artificial civilization and in the lap of nature. The poem "Tintern Abbey" may be called a document of the influence of nature on human mind. The gradual growth of mind under the influence of nature is revealed here. Here the poet says that nature fortifies the mind and leads it from joy to joy. It shapes one's feeling and directs them into proper channel. Nature in this poem is the custodian of the poet's thoughts. The poet here becomes a pantheist, a believer in the spiritual communication between nature and man.

To mention another characteristic, we can say Mysticism. Mysticism is widely known as becoming one with God or the absolute. It may also refer to some kind of ecstasy or altered state of mind which is given a religious and spiritual meaning. The poem "Tintern Abbey" may be called a spiritual autobiography of Wordsworth. It expresses the central faith of the poet William Wordsworth. Here the Abbey stands as the symbol of the triumph of nature over the works man and through it of a realization of the significance of the relation of nature and men. Nature to the poet has now become spiritualized. The poet now feels the existence of an indwelling spirit in nature, which entering into every object gives that freshness and beauty. The contemplation of this spirit fills the poet with great thoughts. It is the guardian of his heart and guide to his moral life. It is a ministering angel to his whole existence. nature imparts to him a moral and spiritual pleasure.

Besides mysticism, interest in the past is also an important characteristic of romantic literature and in the poem this feature is also evident. When the poet mentions of 'hermit' we find a supernatural touch in the poem. Sorcery which was a common practice in the mediaeval ages find an echo through the word 'hermit'. Besides, the poet's mention of "the heavy and weary weight" (line 39) is a hint of his disturbed state of mind for the excess of the reign of terror in the wake of the French revolution, which the poets supported previously.

Again, subjectivity is one of the most important features of romantic literature. The romantic poets give out much of themselves. They express their feelings, thoughts, and imaginations in their writings. Subjectivity constitutes a cardinal feature of the romantic literature and if we see the poem "Tintern Abbey", will find that the poet has written the poem in the first person, it means that he expresses himself in the poem. The main theme of the poem is the poet's love of nature which has its culmination in mystical pantheism. The poet here glorifies nature as an unending force that works on man to purify his character and uplift his soul. The poet's love of nature, as expressed in the poem, is the main concern here. The poem is greatest exultation the mind of man.

Escapism is a charge that is often leveled against romantic literature. The romantic poets often mounted on their wings of imagination and forgot the present world. This was due to their painful

realization, their state of unhappiness, their consciousness of the sorrow of the contemporary world. So, they were in continuous search for refuse of happiness. Thus escapism became an important characteristic of romantic literature and if we see the poem "Tintern Abbey", we will find that the words used in the poem simplify the outlook of a romantic age person who seeks to escape from the social and political hubbub. Besides, the lines-

".....when like roe

I bounded over the mountains, by the sides

of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,

wherever nature led: more like a man

Flying from something that you dreads than one

Who sort the thing he loved."

These lines indicate Wordsworth as a man who was flying from human society which he dreaded. Escapism is clearly evident here.

Last but not the least, melancholy note is an important characteristic of romantic literature. The escapist mentality of the romantic literature is born out of the melancholy feeling of the writers. It is due to their desire to get out of their painful state, so they mount on the wings of imagination and land in world of happiness and beauty, which is a proof against life tragedies. Besides which is the mention of 'gypsy' and 'hermit' in the poem indicate slow human suffering. Melancholy note is clearly indicated here.

Conclusion

So, we see that the poem "Tintern Abbey" contains a number of features to be qualified as a romantic poem, like humanism, return to nature, subjectivity, interest in the past, escapism, melancholy note etc. So, the inclusion of the poem "Tintern Abbey" in "Lyrical Ballads", the publication of which is taken by many as the beginning of romantic periodis clearly justified, as the poem itself is a romantic one.

Reference

1. Manindra Nath Sinha, An Introduction to the History of English literature, Shreedhar Prakashani, 2016
2. Kalyan Nath Dutta, Some Aspects of the History of English literature, Debi Book concern, 2006 edition reprint 2009.
3. Dr Kalyan Pandey, An Analysis of English Poetry (Romantic to Modern Ages), Grantha Tirtha Publisher, revised edition 2008.
4. Kanav Gupta, Romantic Poets, Worldview Publications, 2015