

ENGLISH EXTENSION I

Romanticism Essay

The Romantic Period occurred in the latter part of 18th century, opposing order & formal symmetry of Neoclassicism and was influenced by the radical & revolutionary ideas inspired by the French Revolution in 1789 and through the later wars against Napoleonic France. [LINK](#). The scientific, religious, philosophical and economic paradigms shaped the exploration of an array of Romantic beliefs. This is illustrated in John Keats' poetry, namely To Autumn (Autumn) (1819) and Bright Star (1819), Jane Austen's novel Northanger Abbey (Abbey) (1817), Dante Gabriele Rossetti's painting Lady Lilith and the sonnet Body's Beauty (Lilith) (1868) and Percy Shelley's poem To a Skylark (Skylark) (1820).

Nature is a prevalent concept evident in the texts, enforcing the veneration of nature at a time when it was threatened by urbanization and industrialisation. [LINK](#). John Keats' Autumn is a lyrical ode, celebrating autumn as a season of abundance, reflection, preparation for winter and a season worthy of admiration. Romantics focused on spring, as it was regarded the season for new life. *Contextually, there was a new focus on rural/country areas due to repercussions of impacts of the Industrial Revolution.* Yet this ode conveys the notion that the end of life is equally significant as its commencement. Enjambment is used extensively throughout the poem; "...how to load and bless/With fruit the vines..." to emphasize the harmony of nature. This is accentuated through the use of alliteration; "...winnowing wind". The composer uses autumn to symbolise the maturity in human and animal lives, portrayed through the abundance of archetypal images; "Conspiring with him how to load and bless". *This additionally conveys the contextual religious beliefs through the mention of blessing and also illustrates man's affiliation with nature and its ability to transform lives.* Abbey evidences the adoration of nature through the settings of the novel, Fullerton, Bath and Northanger Abbey. Austen utilises sensual imagery "...awe to afford a glimpse of its massy walls of grey stone, rising amidst a grove of ancient oaks, with the last beams of sun playing in beautiful splendour" to emphasise Catherine's fondness of and affiliation with nature. This accumulation of vivid descriptions, "...luxuriant plantations, and the steep woody hills rising behind to...her feeling of delight were so strong" illuminates her love for the natural world and reflects the romantic convention of a protagonist in communion with nature. Sleeping Beauty enforces comparable relationships with nature, namely through the characterization of Aurora. She is brought up in the forest under the care of three fairies and forms a bond with nature during her life, becoming close friends with the animals surrounding her. Her innocent character is mirrored by the purity of the surrounding forest, both character and environment being untainted and sheltered from the evils of the world. This notion of purity was idealised by Romantics who often incorporated it within their works.

Autumn consists of hyperbole; "to bend with apples" to emphasize the abundance of growth and maturity that takes place in autumn. Keats employs anthropomorphism "Thee sitting careless on a granary floor/...sound asleep/Drowned with fume of poppies..." to attribute an almost human personality to the season. Epitomizing autumn as the goddess allows the composer to describe the nature of the season extensively, additionally *alluding to the prevalent use of opium in that era.* Sensual imagery is used; "...touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue" to symbolise the day's end, foreshadowing the end of autumn. Additionally aural imagery is employed; "...full grown lambs loud bleat.../Hedge-crickets sing..." to pay homage to the season. Bright Star similarly develops a symbol of perfection which is beyond the reach of man; a perfection which should not be desired. *This demonstrates the contextual new focus on the worth of the individual's unique attributes, rather than the expectations of society.*

The star is symbolic of the immortality of nature and juxtaposes the superiority of nature with the transience of man-made aspects. The composer represents immortality as a perfection which can be found at the heart of the changeable. This is significantly resembled in Skylark where the bird

symbolises nature and the composer refers to it as a continual inspiration for art. Symbolism and enjambment are used “Like a star in heaven/in broad daylight/ thou art unseen...” to accentuate the beauty and surreal nature of the skylark. Aural imagery is also employed; “thy shrill delight” to illustrate how the skylark’s song is just as admirable. This depicts the delight romantic poets associated with nature, additionally emphasized through the use of positive connotations in the same stanza. The main theme portrayed throughout the poem is the power of nature to transform lives, epitomised in the last stanza through the use of enjambment; “Teach my half the gladness/That thy brain must know/From my lips would flow/The world should listen then, as I am listening now.” *This reflects how the Industrial Revolution dehumanized conditions within the city and the degradation of the natural landscape in the name of “technological advancement”.*

The recurring Romantic belief that imagination is the approximate human equivalent of the creative powers of nature or even deity is evident in the texts. [LINK](#). Catherine’s characterization and vivid sensual imagery in [Abbey](#); “Will not your mind misgive you, when you find yourself in this gloomy chamber – too lofty and extensive for you, with only the feeble rays of single lamp to take in its size...the bed of, dark green stuff” conveys the size of the room and Catherine’s nature of paying particular detail to such intricate elements, reflecting her imaginative personality. The use of rhetorical questions “What can it hold? Why should it be placed here? ... I will look into it - cost me what it may” portrays her inquisitive nature, resulting in her tendency to exaggerate the simplest aspects of her life into a whirlwind adventure through her imagination. The employment of exclamatory assertions; “Here was another proof. A portrait - very life - of a departed wife, not valued by the husband! He must have been dreadfully cruel to her!” accentuates Catherine’s tendency to weave extravagant tales out of small issues. *However, Henry’s encouragement for her to look within herself reflects the Romantic notion of self-knowledge and solitary introspection, reinforcing the contextual major shifts in understanding of human subjectivity.* [Lilith](#) similarly evidences imagination through the painting and sonnet which was apparently appropriated from Goethe and La Belle Dame Sans Merci by John Keats; “the witch he loved before the gift of eve”. Lilith represents the romantic seductress, femme fatale that is described in the inscription of the painting’s frame. Shelley uses sensual imagery in [Skylark](#) “the pale purple even/melts around thy flight” to foreground the skylark’s beauty and additionally conveys the freedom and imagination represented by its flight. This freedom is also depicted through alliteration; “soaring ever singest.” The skylark’s flight mirrors the freedom from restraint the romantics craved, which illustrates the repressive societal attitudes of that era.

[Lilith](#) portrays how the iconography and metaphor of a woman’s hair remains powerful and was revered during the time as the more abundant the hair, the more overtly sexual and inviting the female was perceived to be. The employment of symbolism in; “And her enchanted hair was the first gold” conveys this significance attributed to her enchanting hair, valued as highly as mankind’s first rarity. This represents the woman as sexually powerful and devouring figures, similar to the legendary Eve and Pandora who threaten the safety of man, *thereby evoking religious connotations while reflecting imaginative transcendence.* Imagination is illustrated in the form on Dark Romanticism in [Sleeping Beauty](#) in the form of supernatural themes, particularly the unconcealed magical world in which they live. Mystical music accompanies the fairies entrance into the forest revealing that they are benevolent and their magic is solely used for noble purposes. The antagonist is named ‘maleficent’, symbolic of her evil character. Every aspect of her demonic character is reflects a form of evil, accentuated by the green light that continually surrounds her. Her cold and commanding voice and harsh shrieks that break the silence in her presence evoke fear in the audience.

Paradoxically, Romantics could be fiercely individualistic on the one hand & radically socialist on the other, evident in the texts. [Lilith](#) is an expression of the fears and desires held by the Victorian audience in an era encompassing a range of social and religious restraints. Lilith’s facial expression and body language reveals her to be self-absorbed; her eye contact is neither engaging nor encouraging to the male viewer. She represents the “new woman” of the Victorian era yet additionally portrays the contextual view that a woman’s beauty is a façade behind which sins are

hidden. This is illustrated through the employment of negative connotations and sibilance; “ere the snake's, her sweet tongue could deceive”. The absence of the corset illustrates open sexuality, as it symbolises self restraint and indicates a sense of moral righteousness which was highly valued in the Victorian era. The background of the painting illustrates how Lilith is an imaginative realm, a private world which blends the sensual and the supernatural. She is the figure in communion with nature and represents her inner state and self as a snakelike form. This is accentuated through the use of sibilance; “soft-shed kisses and soft sleep shall snare”. *This reflects the contextual concern with registering the knowledge embodied by art and the kind of cognition, somatic as well as mental, involved in art's appreciation.* Similarly Skylark focuses on man's search for meaning through interactions with the natural world, accentuating the rejection of urbanization and embracing individuality. Additionally this reveals the hostility the romantics demonstrated towards the technological developments that took place due to the industrial revolution. This romantic concept is evident in all the poems explored as the poets rejected the scientific advancements by placing an importance on imagination and creativity.

The Romantic fascination with overwrought emotion is conveyed particularly in Sleeping Beauty. Romantics were the first to celebrate romantic love as the natural birthright and destiny of every human being, and as the most magnificent and powerful of all human emotions. This is revealed in the love between the Prince Phillip and Aurora. The romantic idea of the power of dreams and imagination is portrayed when Aurora calls Prince Phillip as if from a dream, and they celebrate this mystic power by uniting in song. Similarly, the concept of freedom is demonstrated when Maleficent traps Aurora in the highest tower of a castle surrounded by dense, thorny vines and Prince Phillip rescues her from this tower. This clearly illustrates the Romantic encouragement of merging romance with reality. Star comparably demonstrates the idea of passionate love in the paradox; “To feel for ever its soft swell and fall/And so like ever” demonstrates how the persona's lover's heartbeat is the only source of perfection in the real world. Similarly, paradox is employed in the persona's desire to be immortal so he may experience love for eternity but to be in love, he must be human. Sibilance is used; “...so live ever – or else swoon to death: to attribute a soft, calm image of his lover. Similarly alliteration is used for the same purpose; “tender-taken”. Keats' use of enjambment and anthropomorphism “The moving waters at their priestlike task/Of pure ablution round earth's human shores”, continues the soft musical rhythm of the poem *while alluding to the religious act of ceremonial waters cleansing the earth. The water bears spiritual significance, the “ablution” suggesting religious purification. Additionally conveys the Christian influence in the persona trying to present death as the same thing as eternal life. This reflects religious contextual beliefs and is furthermore demonstrated in To Autumn where nature is portrayed as a catalyst for healing, just as depicted in Keats' On The Sea.*

Conclusion