CHAPTER V

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Romanticism unlike any other literary movement in the history of English literature offers wider range of resistance and a bigger scope of linguistic colours and flavours. Owing to its multifarious intents and interests, romanticism has assumed the status of an epistemic and problematic identity.

As a result of its permanent resistance during the different literary ages, Romanticism needs to be reconsidered and reassessed constantly in order to spotlight on the changing shades of meanings associated with the concept of Romanticism. This is because romanticism, in some form or the other, persists in terms of the perceptions, assimilations and artistic presentations.

The first generation of Romanticism offered a type of Romanticism noticeably distinguished from what was presented by the second generation of it. What offered by both romantic generations is traditional if compared with the new Romanticism which emerged as a response to both Modernism and Postmodernism.

Coleridge, the pioneer of Romanticism and one of the Big Five, gifted Romanticism with a unique shade of romance as its medium and means of versification is in the form of supernaturalism. The supernatural romance offered by him is not the supernatural in its general sense but rather a Coleridgean brand of supernaturalism which distinguishes him from the other poets or authors who employ it as the chief medium of expression. It was agreed that whereas Wordsworth would deal with the natural, Coleridge would deal with the persons and character supernatural, and creates an atmosphere and linguistic system that
emceed in suspending disbelief and make supernatural absolutely logical in terms of contextualization.

Distance and remoteness, gradual introduction of the supernatural elements, refining and subjectivity, suggestiveness, vagueness, indefiniteness, use of occult forces, the realistic nature of the supernatural, fusion of the natural and the supernatural, creation of proper atmosphere and fertility are among the features and techniques Coleridge mastered and employed while producing his prominent genuine romantic poetry. Furthermore, these techniques together with some likely modern themes he employed, take his poetry beyond the limits of time and space.

The Gothic atmosphere of his poetry, his thematic concern and linguistic structure attribute his poems a unique dimension which characterizes a modern/postmodern discourse. Coleridge, at times directly and quite often tangentially but subtly addresses the issues like exploration/oppression of the weaker, suffering of the frailer, of the marginalized innoce or innocent in the present context. Unrestrained expression and free flow of imagination and versification keep him firmly grounded in romanticism and quite ahead of his times in his themes and techniques.

He introduces both major and minor female characters in his poems especially his masterpieces i.e. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*, where he shows tacitly a notable sympathy with women who live in a manly unjust society. Woman can be a victim (Christabel), an up-normal manly woman (Geraldine), mighty (Life-in-Death) a charming creature (the haunting beloved waiting for her lover) and a creative source of inspiration (the Abyssinian maid). All these status he grants to his female characters are among what all feminists call for at that time and later on.
The narrative poem, *Christabel*, is a brilliant example and deserves a mentioning here. This poem embodies obviously Coleridge’s consideration of both feminism and vampirism. It draws Coleridge’s feminist attitude by means of its two major female characters i.e. Christabel, and Geraldine. He tried to hit upon the limitations and boundaries that surround women every time in general and at that time in particular. Christabel is merely a sample of female victims of these boundaries. She should defend her loyalty to her knight meanwhile she cannot resist her female nature i.e. yielding herself; for which, her natural response to her natural desire, she has to suffer the pain of sin and shame. Geraldine, on the other hand, though beautiful and attractive, is a fagot woman tries to seduce the innocent Christabel to an illegal relation. Such kind of relation is one of the rights for which feminists like, Gloria Steinem pointed out that some of them were becoming the men they wanted to marry. Supernaturalism and gothic atmosphere are Coleridge’s devices to treat this sensitive theme in a way which enables him to distance himself from the scene. The poem embodies Coleridge’s deep rooted affinity with women.

There can be no doubt that Geraldine is supposed to be some sort of vampiric creature i.e. ‘the reanimated body of a dead person believed to come from the grave at night and suck the blood of persons asleep; or a woman who exploits and ruins her lover’. The following are evidence of the vampiric features affiliated to Geraldine by Coleridge: one can easily notice the mastery and poetic expertise of Coleridge in his attribution of vampire features to Geraldine. Primarily, he creates the atmosphere, ‘the midnight hour, the full moon, the spectral appearance of Geraldine’. Christabel’s innocence, her touch, her invitation, Geraldine’s fainting and her refusal to pray and the mastiff’s acknowledgement of an evil presence exemplify suspension of disbelief. It is further authenticated at the
blazing-up of embers as Geraldine passes and her weakness when she sees the curved cherub (a Christian icon) on the ceiling.

Both themes, the theme of feminism and that of vampirism are a good evidence to link Coleridge to the recent times.

If Coleridge delivers his romanticism by means of supernaturalism; Keats, the worshipper of beauty, projects his romanticism via unique aesthetic trajectory. He is capable of creating beauty even out of ugliness. In his *Ode to a Nightingale*, for example, Keats can find in the feelings of pain, suffering and numbness a hidden ecstasy, a spiritual joy and an eternal pleasure. Out of the mortal death Keats finds immortal life. Briefly, Keats’ conception of beauty can be identified as follows: It is the religion, the faith and the style that stands as a spectrum involves different shades of truth, power, imagination, sensuous charm and spiritual values.

Keats spent six years of his life in the study of medicine (five years of apprenticeship and a year at Guy's and St. Thomas' Hospitals in London), it is, as it is then believed, a period equivalent to the time he spent writing poetry. Thus, Keats’ medical knowledge should also be taken into consideration.

One of the important dimensions of Keats’ creative vision and art is his romantic medicine. Surprisingly this aspect of his art has not received adequate critical attention it deserves. This branch of medicine has been ignored as a reaction to the triumph of French mechanism. In 20th century, however, Romantic medicine has been separated from science by the modern theorists who studied Romantic art. Keats employs a pattern of romantic imagery and symbols that act as a medical prescription with its soothing and curing efficacies. A sensitive reader can easily detect remedies in the elements of nature.
Keats’ odes deliver a typical romantic medicine. In his *Ode on Melancholy*, for example, The physician-poet presents, by means of the poem, a medical report that consists of three main parts; each part represented by a stanza in the poem. The first part of the report is about the drugs that can be used to decrease the pain resulted by melancholy and his recommendation regarding the side effects of these drugs (first stanza). One should not seek escape from the pain of melancholy in poisons and drugs that destroy consciousness which is a very high price to pay. The second part prescribes the most appropriate remedy that has no side effects (second stanza): When the fit of melancholy falls as a weeping cloud, that waters every beautiful thing with despair and sorrow and consequently overwhelsms the patient fully with sadness, then the ideal treatment for it is returning to the beauty of nature and gaining the joy of it. The remedy is the pleasure gained from the beauty of the “morning rose”, “the rainbow of the salt stand-wave” and “the wealth of globed peonies”:

But when the melancholy fit shall fall  
Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,  
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,  
And hides the green hill in an April shroud;  
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,  
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,  
Or on the wealth of globed peonies.

The third part describes the nature and reality of this psychological state i.e. melancholy. Melancholy dwells with beauty and joy! This is because melancholy can be relieved by means of beauty and joy meanwhile it can be caused by both of them since it exists in the shortness of the time of beauty, pleasure and joy:

She dwells with Beauty - Beauty that must die;  
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips  
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,  
Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:  
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil’d Melancholy has her sovrán shrine.

Other odes like *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on Indolence*, even *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* and *Lamia*, and *Ode to Autumn* offer in one way or another explicitly or implicitly a kind of medical romanticism. This is because Keats the romantic poet, who practiced medicine for a period of time equal to the period of composing poetry, cannot avoid the conscious or unconscious effect of medicine on his poetry. Keats’ patients are all human beings; the prescriptions he offers have the form of songs or poems; and his potential medicine is beauty in all its forms.

Contrary to Coleridge, Keats has treated the theme of vampires in an elegant way. Keats’ Lamia suggests Coleridge’s Geraldine due to the fact that both represent snake-vampire women who are capable of deceiving their lovers because they can disguise themselves easily. Meanwhile the way of presenting these two characters are different. Coleridge, the poet of supernaturalism, overwhelms his character with mystery and panic whereas Keats presents his character, Lamia, with the finesse of aesthetics. Coleridge’s Geraldine has a hissing sound and ugly breasts whereas Keats’ Lamia shows a polite, lovely and courteous manners which may get one to wonder whether Keats did change his mind halfway during the poem or not.

In *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, Keats follows the same strategy of beautifying the ugliness of the vampire character even in the most crucial moment:

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She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gazed, and sighed deep,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
So kiss’d to sleep.
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In spite of the fact that each of the romantic pioneers, Coleridge and Keats, produces distinguished romantic shades add more private character to the traditions of Romanticism, both of them represent the typical spirit
of Romanticism and keep adding flavours of their creative genius. Their romantic stance, however, does not advocate or betray any escape from the demands and pressures of life. Evil, in the poetry of Coleridge and Keats, both, in the literal and metaphorical sense, initiates poetic debates on the issues that plague the modern and post-modern times.

Placing Yeats upon any axis, which divides poets between Romantics and Modernists, certainly, is fraught with difficulties. Because he wrote his most celebrated poems in the early twentieth century, Yeats adopts different ideological positions like radical nationalist, liberal classicalist, reactionary, conservative and millenarian nihilist. He is, however, listed as a modernist.

Although the works of Yeats in general and his poems in particular have been studied by a number of scholars; the links that affiliate Yeats to the traditions of Romanticism have not received adequate attention as yet.

Surprisingly, Yeats invariably did his best to maintain the importance of Romanticism as he believed in its bearing in the recent times. He has, more often than not, admitted that he is a romanticist in many shades and senses of the term. He has also stressed Romanticism’s invariability and persistence in the modern age. Any sensitive reader can, quite easily, find out the basic tenets of romanticism operating effectively in the creation of other time arts like painting, literature and even music.

Like Coleridge and Keats. W. B. Yeats adds his own private prints to the traditions of Romanticism; but these prints are predominantly modern ones dyed with all the contradictions, paradoxes and chaos of the 20th century.

The themes presented by Yeats like love, personal relations, some locations and sceneries around Ireland, legends, nationalism, aging, mortality, and death, life and immortality, nature and artificiality, do seem apparently as common themes and these themes are dexterously
poeticized in the complex context of his times. The generic modus operandi, nonetheless unerringly takes recourse to pastoral strategies. All the poetic devices unfailingly indicate the richness of his poetic vision and this vision, if can safely be argued, has an inbuilt ballast of nature. *Byzantium, Sailing to Byzantium, Leda and the Swan* and a host of other poems that are discussed in the preceding chapter, buttress the case in point. *Lake Isle of Innesfree*, for instance, appears to be an anti-virus against the contagious and emaciating pressures of time and space where peace comes dropping slow from the veils of the morning, where, the scorching afternoon is turned purple glow and evenings are full of linnets’ songs.

Whatever the romantics had to say about the unmistakable link between man and nature, Yeats has his own philosophical poetic predilection. Wordsworth in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* considers ‘man’ and ‘nature’ as essentially adapted to each other. He takes human mind a ‘mirror’ of the most beautiful and the most interesting qualities of nature. Coleridge does not believe as Wordsworth does that return to nature is necessary for ‘self knowledge’. Nevertheless, he does not deny the necessity of nature to register reverence to God and even to worship Him. Keats may not have a well-defined philosophy of nature. Even so, he glorifies it, celebrates and worships its magnificent beauty as it is. His poetic aesthetics finds culmination in the contiguity of ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’.

Yeatsian brand of romanticism needs to be seen in its own contextual perspective. Like any other romanticist, Yeats employs the theme of return to nature to accentuate his own purpose which is mainly self-identity as an Irish national. Yeats’ landscape descriptions are often obviously Irish, even if they do not include a specific place name, he
highlights the rolling greenness and shifting light that characterize the Irish landscape.

For him, nature is a vehicle toward self-knowledge or self-consciousness. His preoccupation with natural phenomena amounts to a search for the true self, for his own real identity which is Yeats Irish national. It is also a healing power. It is therapy for a diseased, over civilized heart. The poems *To an Isle in the Water*, *The Indian to his Love*, *The White Birds* and *To an Isle in the Water* are good evidence for this idea. Nature is, also, a refuge from the artificial constructs of the civilized world and the poem *The Lake of Innisfree*, expresses this idea clearly.

However, this treatment is apparently paradoxical because sometimes he sees nature as an eternalized power that is why he wants, together with his beloved, to take natural forms. Meanwhile he sees nature changeable and mortal:

> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> Caught in that sensual music all neglect
> Monuments of unageing intellect. (*Sailing to Byzantium*).

Superiority of individuality is one of Yeats’ dominant faiths. For him, individuals should not lose their individuality or personal independence for the sake of anything. Yeats himself represents a unique and distinguished individual who revolts against traditions of poetry, philosophy, religion, policy, and society. He is that type of individual who creates his own traditions and system regardless of their appropriateness with the traditions of the world around him.

Politically, being a patriotic Irish poet who was in love with the politic Irish young woman, Maud Gonne, Yeats did not separate his literary productions from the political consequences especially those in relation with Irish independence. Yeats integrates politics with poetry and
believes that versification can be an absolute weapon if skillfully employed.

Religiously, Yeats rejected Christianity early in his life, but his lifelong study of Mythology, Theosophy, Spiritualism, Philosophy, and the Occult demonstrate his profound interest in the divine and how it interacts with humanity. This will lead us to another Yeatsian attitude which is Yeats’ interest in occult and mysticism. Such interest is clear in poems like *The Second Coming*, *Sailing to Byzantium* and *The Magi (1916)*.

Poetically, he was considered as a transition from the Romanticism of the 19th century to the Modernism of the 20th century. Yeats started his early poetic career as a purely romantic poet; but, gradually, he shifted his creative focus on the predominant literary and intellectual issues that govern modernism and postmodernism. Yeatsian romanticism assists and ascertains his poetic stance. Romanticism with Yeats, is a means to interiorize chaos. His romantic/poetic phraseology plays a very significant role in taking up the complex paradoxical and political upheavals and transforming them into an enduring poetic discourse.

Romantics stand for the supremacy of imagination over reason. For them imagination is not only part from reality, but the reality itself. In other words, imagination gets us not only to perceive the world around us, but also in part creates it as Wordsworth suggested. So, Imagination is the real world for the romantics. Yeats, like William Blake, goes beyond the immediate nature/natural context and enters the eternal world of ‘spirit’, or ‘intellect’ and ‘art’; as he does in *To Ireland in the Coming Times*. Though his transcendence of the ordinary grants him an authentic source of ‘self-knowledge’, he keeps dreaming and knowing the dream.
Yeats, all of us agree, was a great creative mind and had his own imaginative wings. Occult, folklore, myths, legends, and creative symbols, such as the gyre, the swan, the great beast, the tower, the rose, and Byzantium, are all examples of these creative imaginative wings that aid Yeats’ supremacy of imagination and enable him to present his poems in a modern and, meanwhile, romantic way. In spite of the fact that some critics recognized Yeats as a symbolist, Yeatsian symbolism is always tinged with intellectual shades and simultaneously indicates romantic direction of perception, conception and presentation. It is the subterranean romantic pain that grants unique dimensions even to his highly intellectual poetic productions.

Romantics emphasized imagination believing that it is not only means to reach reality but rather it is the reality itself; they emphasized emotions as well and generally called for greater attention to the emotions as a necessary supplement to purely logical reason. Yeats, like Coleridge, Blake, Shelly or Keats, psychologically suffers from the falsity of reality and consequently resorts to emotions and dreams to soothe this suffering. The poem called *The Song of the Happy Shepherd* is a good example to mention in support.

Not only did this supremacy of emotions dominate Yeats’ literary productions but his personal relations too. His relationship with Maud Gonne testifies the statement. She, however, continues to be a spring source of his creative imagination. Even his political ideas and his Irish nationalism were greatly influenced by his love and Lady-Love.

He wrote the majority of his poems for her. He wrote poems on romantic love, on dreams of successful love, longing for the beloved, a barren passion, pure love for Gonne, the love of the old man, the physical love, spiritual idealistic love and on satisfaction of spiritual love through physical love.
If Coleridge stands for the first stage of Romanticism which is not far away from gothic-style, and Keats stands for the second stage which is absolutely pure romantic; Yeats, who is recognized as a transition from Romanticism to Modernism, stands for what can be called Modern Romanticism where Modernism and Romanticism get happily blended.

From the perspective of this study, Romanticism is the most prominent literary movement because its genres go back to the age of Plato, passing through the Medieval and Elizabethan ages; and when it was neglected in the age of Reason, it revived, flourished and reached its peak from the late 18th to the mid-19th century; resisted the Modernism and renewed during the Postmodernism in a new form that can be called ‘New Romanticism’. This new Romanticism is still in need of further study and more research.

The Strains of Romanticism, in a new perspective, can also be traced out in the recent literary discourses in terms of ideological interpolations, environmental drives and an inherent quest for order, individual, socio-cultural and economic freedom, attempting to break the capitalistic shackles. Rethinking can also reveal the fact that these discourses portray a romantic search for a society signified by ethnic, racial, communal harmony, a society signified by equality and without disparity almost a utopian society. Romanticism continues inspiring and influencing the poetic imagination and, therefore, does, justifiably, demand rethinking and reassessment.