

Creative writing and the creation of the poet: A romantic perspective¹**Amjad ALSYOUNF²****Abstract**

The term creative is based on the inventive powers the mind possesses. These powers are the source of imagination which is a main feature required for poetry composition. One of the major literary movements that placed an early emphasis on the powers of imagination is Romanticism. William Wordsworth regards imagination as one of the essential qualities the poet should have and employ in the process of creating poetry. Versification is among the higher forms of creative writing as it requires particular sense of rhyme and meter. However creative writing from a romantic perspective is centered on the figure of the poet as a creator who owns distinguished imaginative powers and techniques beside the skills of verse composition. Nature in the romantic tradition is deemed a major source from which the poet fills his reservoir of imagination needed to write poetry. Against this background, the study of creative writing from a romantic viewpoint should be based on the examination of the concept of the *creation of the poet*. This paper therefore aims to investigate the romantic conception of creative writing as an activity leading to an inventive production owned by a creator who has already passed a process through which he himself is created as a talented poet.

Key words: Creative writing, romanticism, creation of the poet.

Yaratıcı yazarlık ve şairin yaratması: Romantik bir bakış açısı**Öz**

İbdâ terimi, aklın sahip olduğu yaratıcı güçlerle kuvvetli bir bağa sahiptir. Bu güçler, şiir, yazmak için istenen ana özellik olan hayalin kaynağıdır. Hayal güçlerine erken bir şekilde önem veren başlıca edebi akımlardan biri romantizmdir. William Wordsworth, hayali, bir şairin sahip olması ve şiir yazarken kullanması gereken başlıca sıfatlardan biri olarak saymaktadır. Şiirin nazmı, vezin ve kafiye için özel bir his gerektiren yaratıcı yazım şekillerinin en üstünlerinden biridir. Fakat bir romantğin perspektifinden yaratıcı yazım, şiirsel beyitleri oluşturma mahareti yanı sıra üstün hayali kudret ve tekniklere sahip bir yaratıcı gibi şairin şahsiyeti etrafında döner. Romantik geleneklerde tabiat / mizaç, şairin şiir yazmak için lazım olan hayal deposunu doldurduğu temel bir kaynak sayılır. Yukarıdakilere binaen, Romantizmin bakış açısına göre yaratıcı yazımın incelemesi, şairin doğuşu mefhumunun incelenmesine istinad etmesi gerekir. Bu sebeple önünüzdeki sayfa, yetenekli bir şair gibi kendini inşa faaliyetinin bilfiil üstesinden gelen bir yaratıcının sahip olduğu orijinal üretime yol açan bir faaliyet olarak yaratıcı yazımın romantik mefhumunu incelemeyi hedefliyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Yaratıcı yazarlık, romantizm, şairin yaratması.

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Introduction

Creativity is based on the inventive powers the mind possesses and employs. These powers undergo a process of development through which the human mind externally communicates with the surrounding world, and then internally with itself. They are the primary source of imagination required for creative writing in general, and poetry composition in particular as far as the romantic worldview is concerned. The examination of English romantic poetry highlights the essential function of imagination in establishing the creative artistic value of the literary work. The romantic poet utilizes textual imagistic pictures and objects that grow to reach a state of artistic maturity where a masterpiece is finally generated. A romantic poem is therefore strictly considered a creative activity pursued by a unique creator who aids with his imaginative capacity its development and production as a creative piece of writing. It is against this background that this paper deals with selected English romantic poetry aiming to investigate the concept of creative writing through examining the process of the creation of the poet.

Discussion

William Wordsworth (1802), the major English romantic poet and poet laureate of his time, places imagination on top of the essential qualities that poets should enjoy and utilize for poetry composition. Wordsworth examines the concept of poetry creation in connection to imagination in the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* where he points out that the primary objective of his poetry is “to chuse incidents and situations from common life... [and] to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way” (1802, p. vii). The function of imagination in this context is technically essential due to its re-presentational powers that grant a special privilege to the work of art, and render the ordinary incidents and situations of life more enticing and captivating of the reader’s mind and appreciation. The purpose of imagination consequently becomes twofold; it is supportive of the artistic value concerned with the making of the poem, and of the aesthetic value by adding pleasure to its reading experience.

Poetry is among the most refined types of creative writing in so far as it conveys thought in an exciting imaginative melodic manner, which demands particular skills of a genius creator. The romantic school conceives the poet as a creator who utilizes his experience with nature and employs his faculty of imagination to create appealing poems. Imagination is a seed watered by sense experiences during the life of man to grow to an enormous tree of creativity. The poet grows up side by side with his poetic imagination to finally deliver a distinct artistic product of versification. The process of the growth of man’s poetic imagination and versification skills is at the heart of the concept of the creation of the poet inasmuch as verse creative writing is an activity leading to produce an inventive product generated by a poet/creator already having passed a process of being created as a genius bard.

The formation of the poetical character begins early at the stage of youth. There is almost no life experience whether great or low that is insignificant to the making of the poet. They all contribute to the growth of the poetical imaginative intellect required for the creation of the poet. Wordsworth’s experience while “a babe in arms”³ forms the solid roots and most significant part of the great tree of poetry he has planted. His autobiographical poem *The Prelude: Or, Growth of a Poet’s Mind* (1850) is regarded by critics as “the account of the growth of an individual mind to artistic maturity”

³ Wordsworth, W. (1850). *The Prelude*, p. 14. At this part of the poem Wordsworth introduces his experience with Derwent river while still “a babe in arms,” meaning very young.

(Wordsworth, Abrams, & Gill, 1979, p. ix). The artistic maturity is the summit the poet reaches when his poetical skills are perfected and his poetic character is well developed and created.

Nature and the Creation of the Poet

An essential part of the process of development of the romantic character that leads to the creation of the poet is concerned with the poet's relationship and communion with nature. The connection between the romantic poet and nature occupies a great part of the body of English romantic poetry. Nature accompanies the romantic poet in the different stages of his life and supports his growth and creation as a talented writer. Wordsworth (1850) in Book I of *The Prelude* argues about the very early influence of nature on him while still a little child:

___Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
And, from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flowed along my dreams? For this, didst thou,
O Derwent!⁴ winding among grassy holms
Where I was looking on, a babe in arms,
Make ceaseless music that composed my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me
Amid the fretful dwellings of mankind
A foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves. (Wordsworth, 1850, p. 14)

The lines articulate the authority that nature enjoys, and through which it honors the poetical character and provides it with the soil it needs to grow a poetic plant that matures very quickly. Undoubtedly, nature is Wordsworth's source of knowledge demanded for the creation of his poetical identity. The relationship between the poet being created and nature becomes one of infatuation. The romantic poet holds great passions for that source of life and creativity which he would vanish and face mental and emotional demise away from. It is the very argument that induces Thomas De Quincey (1950) to describe Wordsworth as a poet with passion "for nature fixed in his blood" (1950, p. 66). He adds that "it [nature] was a necessity of his [Wordsworth] being, like that of a mulberry leaf to the silk-worm, and through his commerce with nature did he live and breathe" (1950, p. 66).

Wordsworth continues his "school-time" adventures in Book II of *The Prelude* given the title "School-Time (Continued)." Though he spends much time with his beloved nature, he feels great internal emptiness. It is the consequence of an early appetite for a marriage with nature that would help him to obtain a rapid growth of his poetic mind and creative imagination. Helen Darbishire (1966) interprets this condition as the poet's need for a mental bloom of imagination, depicting the young poet's mind as "an inner chamber of experience, empty of images" (1966, p. 99). Wordsworth reflects the early longing

⁴ River Derwent in Derbyshire, England. A place Wordsworth used to visit when he was young.

for imagery knowledge he needs for his creation as a poet, a conclusion he vehemently aspires to, in a rejected passage which Darbishire finds in an early manuscript of Book II of *The Prelude*:

By such communion I was early taught
That what we see of forms and Images
Which float along our minds and what we feel
Of active or recognizable thought,
Prospectiveness, or intellect, or will,
Not only is not worthy to be deemed
Our being, to be prized as what we are,
But is the very littleness of life. (Wordsworth, 1850, cited in Darbishire, 1966, p. 99)

The creation of the poet is rendered a personal faculty that requires a sharpening of the poet's individual imagination through integration with nature sought as the source of poetic inspiration. The individual's experience of nature and the world is a necessity that results in awarding the poet with an authority given by nature where his subjectivity and self-centeredness are manifested. This authority the poet enjoys "gives rise to the expressive subject, that is, to the modern idea of expression as self-shaping and self-creation, i.e. the idea of self-development" (Murphy & Roberts 2005, p. 43). Subjectivity needed for self-development and self-creation is a pivotal characteristic that accelerates the steps toward the creation of the poet as far as romantic poetry is an expression of the internal artistic activities that carry the poet in a trip to the outer world of nature to interact with and then return back to the self with a poet being skillfully created to start the process of poetry composition.

Imagination as experience

The marriage with nature in the romantic tradition faces different moments of separation where the poet, though unwillingly, stays away from his bride. Experiences built during the former communion with the forms and scenes of nature carry great value in this condition. It is the time when the experience of nature turns into imagination developed away from it. In advanced stages of the creation of the poet, a poet could be sufficient with experience where the formula of deriving imagination from nature is reversed, and when the poet's imagination becomes the source of experience used to compose poetry. It is the moment of genius. It is in this context the time when Wordsworth "was deeply conscious of the power which fostered his genius, and when he probed into its sources he found that it came to him originally through a special awareness of Nature; it was there that a shaft opened which reached down a new world of life" (Darbishire, 1966, p. 107). Wordsworth's (1850) articulation of his former experiences of nature replaced by imaginary experience is treated in Book III of *The Prelude*:

Of Genius, Power,
Creation, and Divinity itself
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What passed within me. Not of outward things. (Wordsworth, 1850, p. 62)

The moment of genius in which the poet arrives at advanced stages of the creation of the poet is relatively popular in different English romantic poetry. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To a Skylark" (1820) is a demonstration of a poet's genius leading to poetry composition out of imagination turned into experience. Petru Golban (2012) states in this regard:

In this poem, the bird is 'blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert'. The skylark neither exists in reality to be 'imitated' in the art of poetry nor is described as a material presence in the text. It is the creation of the poet's mind, the poet imagining such a creature somewhere above him in the sky and being able only to hear its music, its song representing 'profuse strains of unpremeditated art'. (Golban, 2012, p. 137)

Poetic genius is also the theme of "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by Wordsworth (1846). His imagination of himself flying over the charming hills and vales of nature has turned into a poetic experience which he employs finally to compose one of the most fascinating and highly philosophical romantic poems.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze. (Wordsworth, 1846, p. 93)

The poem basically narrates the running stages of poetry composition where Wordsworth's definition of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of power feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth, 1802, p. L) is artistically expressed. The charming fantastic natural scenes become the emblem of the development of his poetic experience. The end of the poem is the moment of poetic genius where the poem and primarily the poet are created:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils. (Wordsworth, 1846, p. 94)

John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is another instant of poetic genius in which the imagination of the poet is turned into experience needed for poetry composition. A Grecian urn is often used to preserve the ashes of cremation, thus it is ugly and uninteresting. The urn is therefore an inartistic object transfigured by the poet's imagination into a magical artistic experience. The richness of the scenes inside the urn – the mortals and immortals, mountains and valleys, men and women, lovers and singers, and music and cheer – is a reflection of the poetic genius that essentially contributes to the creation of the poet and consequently to the composition of poetry through turning imagined objects and scenes into beautiful verses that travel with the readers to magical worlds which they think of as real, though they are not.

What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (Keats, 1917, p. 209)

The moment of recognition of truth at the last stanza of the poem is the high aspiration of the poet to have his poetical self identified with the universe. It is the moment when he is created as a poet after his artistic poetical work is born and is able to address the reader directly with no need for a mediator of any sort. The creation of the autonomous poem that can speak on its own in this context becomes a clear evidence of a poet skillfully born and a poem “overwrought”⁵ to fit the poet’s artistic engagement.

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” (Keats, 1917, p. 211)

Recognition of the universal truth that supports the process of the creation of the poet is also a concern of Wordsworth’s autobiographical poem *The Prelude* early discussed in this paper. Truth for Wordsworth is a superior quality he aspires to realize, both the personal and the universal. He announces in Book I of the poem his intention to find “some philosophic song/ of truth” flowing from the depth of his heart to write an “immortal verse/ thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre” (1850, p. 12). Once his song (poem) is fitted to the “Orphean lyre,” a phrase signifying a poem perfectly composed and versified, it should have then be successful to soar to the world of truth where its artistic value blossoms so great that the poet’s work gets highly valued, and his creation as a poet is masterfully accomplished.

Shelley openly claims the transcendence of his poetry to the realm of truth in his poem “Ode to the West Wind.” He invokes the west wind to his aid to fly with his poems and “scatter” them all over the world. He compares his poetry to a prophetic inspiration that would leave unforgettable memories in the minds of people. The last part of the poem prophesizes that Shelley’s genius and “immortality can be achieved through writing poetry that outlives him” (Alsyouf, 2013, p. 18), and through which he would fulfill the rites of his birth as a poet.

And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! ... (Shelley, 1994, p. 403)

Conclusion

Romantic poetry can be examined as an elaborate form of creative writing produced by a genius writer. A romantic poet passes a quest of developing a poetical experience that helps him to enlighten and train his imagination needed for producing creative written material. The training of the romantic poet’s imagination begins with a marriage between the poet and nature, followed by moments of separation causing the poet to retire to his self and the universe at once. This process accelerates the growth of the poetic imagination and results in the creation of the poet who is regarded as an ideal source of creative writing.

⁵ A word Keats uses in the poem to describe the skillful creation of the urn.

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