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Lyrical Elements in T.S. Eliot's Poetry

Abstract

This paper aims to bring out the lyrical and/or romantic elements in T. S. Eliot's Poetry. Eliot considered himself a Classicist in literature. But it can be noted that his poetry is not altogether devoid of lyrical elements. We can find traces of romanticism, glimpses of his personality, use of romantic imagery and lyrical diction, in his poems. Thus, the main purpose of this paper is to highlight and appreciate Eliot's poetry from a lyrical/romantic perspective.

Key Words: lyrical, romanticism, emotions, personality.

Regardless of the dominance of realism, in modern poetry, the spirit of romance continues to rule the minds of certain poets like Yeats, E. Thomas, Masfield etc. Walter De Le Mare's poetry is full of true romantic spirit bordering on supernaturalism. The works of these poets have the fact that the spirit of romance is as old as the life itself. The works of T.S. Eliot are no exception.

In spite of T.S. Eliot's complete rejection of Romanticism, there are still elements of it in some of his poems. Romanticism stresses expression of personally expressed emotions.

As everyone knows, Poetry, according to Wordsworth, is ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility’ (*Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, 1801). According to Eliot, ‘it is neither emotion nor recollection.’ It is rather concentration of several experiences which do not have any bearing on the poet’s personal life and yet are floating about in the mind of the poet, as well as deliberated upon, get expressed in his poetry (*Tradition and the Individual Talent*, 1919).

A peculiar kind of imagery which includes metaphors and other figures of speech and diction, taken from day to day life as well as from higher reaches of philosophical thought, and rhythm also form other constituents of Romantic poetry. In some of the poems, Wordsworth following his own theory of poetic diction has expressed his own feelings in words taken from day to day life of the farmers, and has used them to express the emotions.

Eliot has also used words from the current English language. Of course, he has based his poetry on the speech rhythms of the English people. Many of his early poems contain Romantic elements, which were later corrected by Ezra Pound. For example, we have in *The Wasteland* (1922),

‘Winter kept us, warm, covering Earth in forgetful snow.’ (I. 5-6)

This ‘forgetful snow’ is a transferred epithet. Pound seriously objected to it for this figure of speech is Romantic. But Eliot retained it. We also have the famous poem *Ash Wednesday* (1930) which begins with the personal ‘I’:

‘Because I do not hope to turn again

Because I do not hope,’ (I. 1-2)

as well as the subsequent lines:

‘Because these wings are no longer wings to fly...’ (I. 35)

A strong undercurrent of Romanticism also flows through the *Ariel poems* where emotions and feelings are dominant. Thought is, of course, not excluded. There are lines from the poem *Marina* (1930), e.g.

‘What is this face, less clear and clearer
The pulse in the arm less strong and stronger –
Given or lent? more distant than stars and nearer than the eye
Whispers and laughter between leaves and hurrying feet
Under sleep, where all the waters meet...
I made this, I have forgotten
And I remember. (18-25)

And another poem *A Song for Simeon* (1928):

‘Not for me the martyrdom, the ecstasy of thought and prayer,
Not for me the ultimate vision.
Grant me thy peace.’ (31-34)

Where there are unmistakable Romantic notes. Through the confession of the failure Saint Simeon, in fact, is Eliot himself in disguise.

Even in the great poem *Four Quartets*, one of which is *Burnt Norton* (1941), there occurs a few Romantic images like:

‘And the bird called in response to
The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery.’ (I. 28-29)

And yet another image which looks back to the famous lines of Henry Vaughan (an Eighteenth century poet):

‘I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless white light...’ (*The World*, 1-2)

can be seen in Eliot’s *Burnt Norton*:

By grace of sense, a white light and moving.' (II. 27)

Thus, it can be said that in spite of Eliot's opposition to Romanticism, he continues to have romantic images in style. He could not help bringing in personal elements or his personality, here and there, in his poems. Other elements like Nature, sense of wonder and a strong sense of mystery are also there, e.g.

'What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands,

What water lapping the bow

And scent of pine and the wood thrush singing through the frog.' (*Marina*, 1-

3)

Here, the protagonist feels a sense of wonder at the phenomenon of Nature, and wonder as Dunstan (*Plurality and Christian Ethics*, 1980) has said is a Romantic quality. Hence, although Eliot has declared himself to be a Classicist in Literature, his poetry is not altogether devoid of Romantic and lyrical elements.

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