



TRACES OF ECOCRITICAL ELEMENTS IN LORD BYRON'S "THERE IS PLEASURE IN THE PATHLESS WOOD"

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 11th June 2022 Accepted: 11th July 2022 Published: 14th August 2022</p>	<p>Eco-criticism as the scientific study of the relationship between nature and human beings plays an important role in the analysis of literary works. This theory is even more significant in Romanticism in which nature was of particular implication and Lord Byron was no exception. This research seeks to study "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" by Lord Byron from an ecocritical viewpoint in order to analyze the way nature is exemplified in this poem and how the beliefs conveyed in it are in accordance with the ecological understanding. It is found that Byron's fascination in nature is because of its restorative power and being regarded as a source of inspiration. In other words, Romanticism which was established as a reaction to the Industrial Revolution and also Romantic poets like Byron referred to the rustic nature as a source of innocence in which God is closer to human beings.</p>

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecology, Lord Byron, Nature

1. INTRODUCTION (GENERAL BACKGROUND)

Lord Byron (1788-1824) was a famous English poet. For Byron as one of the most renowned literary figures of Romanticism, nature played an important role in poetry. The reason was due to Romantic poets' belief that nature is a manifestation of God and simplicity which should be appreciated by humankind. Thus, analyzing Byron's poetry through an ecocritical theory helps understand the close relationship between human beings and nature in literature. This essay seeks to study "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" as a Romantic poem by Lord Byron through the lens of ecocriticism in order to depict Byron's viewpoint regarding the significance of the mutual association between man and nature.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

So far, Lord Byron's poetry has been analyzed through various approaches. For example, in *Lord Byron's strength: Romantic writing and commercial society* (1993), Christensen depends upon a number of the current theories in order to look over our comprehension of Byron and also to reconsider the Romanticism of such other poets as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Scott, Hazlitt, and Shelley. In "A Feminist Reading of Byron's Poetry through the Lens of Susan Gubar, Sandra Gilbert and Kate Millet" (2018), Sulaiman has employed the feminist viewpoints of Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, and Kate Millet to investigate Lord Byron's romantic poetry in order to analyze the inferences of his stereotyping patterns of females because stereotyping of women with lots of compulsory roles and responsibilities for them is noticed extensively in the works of past literature; thus, it is essential to scrutinize past literary works from the standpoint of critical theory so as to have a better understanding of the current works in which women are stereotyped similarly.

In another study entitled "Analyzing and Comparing the Prominent Elements Including Nature, Imagination and Freedom in Literary Works by Lord Byron and Simin Behbahani with a Focus on the Relationship Between and Among These Elements" (2020), Rostami and Rashidi have chosen nature, imagination, and freedom as some of the most significant features of romanticism to analyze in the poems by Lord Byron and Simin Behbahani. They find that the trend towards these three elements in comparison with the other elements of romanticism is similar in the poetry of Byron and Behbahani who have paid especial attention to them. The findings of a comparative examination of the above-mentioned elements indicate that even though Byron and Behbahani were completely different regarding

geography, history, culture, and gender, they had some correspondences which originated from their shared conception of romanticism.

There are also many other researches concerning the analysis of Lord Byron's poetry. However, there is a gap regarding an ecocritical investigation of "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" because no study has ever specifically studied this poem. Ecocriticism allows the researcher to inspect the association between a human being and the natural world in this poem. It also shows Byron's obsession and outlooks towards nature. Hence, this essay is going to answer the following questions: How is nature epitomized in "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood"? And are the beliefs articulated in this poem in line with the ecological understanding?

3. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE ON ECOCRITICISM

The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism (2014) includes a variety of critical viewpoints which are employed to scrutinize the role of nature in literature and film. This book is important in this study because ecocriticism is considered as a key model for critical analysis of Romantic poems in particular. The essays of this handbook also reflect the way many literary works are associated with the natural environment. "Ecocriticism in British Romantic Studies" (2007) is another helpful study in this essay because it revolves around the theory and application of ecocriticism in British Romantic works of literature. Romantic ecocriticism investigates the ways by which many Romantic poets and philosophers contributed to "the history of ecological science, environmental ethics, and environmentalist activism" (p. 172).

In *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (2004), Oerlemans amalgamates a series of standpoints from the Romantic era, and examines the viewpoints of poets and artists along with the perspectives of many theorists and researchers. The mentioned book is beneficial because of helping the readers learn how the Romantics observed the physical world, and how they mistreated it. *Byron's Nature: A Romantic Vision of Cultural Ecology* (2017) is a detailed, ecocritical revision of Lord Byron as one of the most significant ecological poets in the Romantic epoch. In this book, such theories as "political ecology, post-humanist theory, new materialism, and ecological science" are used in order to analyze Byron's major poems and find out how they are profoundly related to establishing a cultural ecology.

4. METHODOLOGY

As the main methodology of this essay, ecocriticism signifies joining literature and ecology together so as to raise consciousness regarding the environmental predicaments that are threatening all the world and human beings. Hence, the ecocritical viewpoints of Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Harold Fromm whose *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (1996) discusses the association between literature and nature will be employed. These three theoreticians are chosen because they study the ways by which writing both embodies and affects human relations with the natural world. The concept 'ecocriticism' was first used in 1978 by William Rueckert in a paper known as "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism" (Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996, p. xxviii). In *Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell (2009) declares that the backgrounds of ecocriticism date back to Romantic era:

If environmental criticism today is still an emergent discourse it is one with very ancient roots. In one form or another the "idea of nature" has been a dominant or at least residual concern for literary scholars and intellectual historians ever since these fields came into being. (p. 2)

This study focuses on a Romantic poem because it is teemed with the features of ecocriticism. Romanticism is in fact an epitome of the principles of ecocriticism. The Romantic poets like Byron endeavored to re-experience and revive the unidentified world so as to create an expressive connection between literature and nature. To such poets, nature was actually the main foundation of motivation and mystical insight. This is the reason why Worster (1977) describes ecocriticism as "a search for holistic or integrated perception, an emphasis on interdependence and relatedness in nature, and an intense desire to restore man to a place of intimate intercourse with the vast organism that constitutes the earth" (p. 82).

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Since its birth, ecocriticism's major purpose has been to shed light on the relationship between nature and human beings, leading to "an understanding of natural environments and human cultures as constantly influencing and constructing each other" (Gersdorf & Sylvia, 2006, p. 91). Ecocriticism has very ancient backgrounds. For example, early in history as in Greek and Roman myths in addition to many religious books, there can be found stories about earth's formation and man's power in the world. To mention an important figure in the history of ecocriticism, the name Henry Thoreau comes to the mind (Garrard, 2012, p. 54). This man was an American naturalist, whose work was about the simple life surrounded by nature. His writings succeeded in altering its readers' way of thinking from "ego-consciousness to eco-consciousness" (Garrard, 2012, p. 169). Moving forward, it can be noticed that nature was also a key point in the imaginative movement of Romanticism during the late eighteenth century.

Romanticism was a significant literary movement and had its origins in the 18th century. Its main focus was on feelings and distinctiveness, fantasy of nature, and disbelief in science. The important role of the Industrial Revolution in this movement's establishment cannot be overlooked either. In fact, the literary figures of Romanticism were all against the modernization characteristics which were happening and thus, they sought to react to them

(Damrosch, 1985, pp. 405-424). Moreover, Romanticism was an attempt to invigorate "medievalism" in order to flee from the increasing population, metropolitan extension, and industrialism (Perpinya, 2014). It is believed that the proceedings and dogmas of the French Revolution were the preliminary reasons because a lot of Romantics were concerned with the revolution and its consequences (Blechman, 1999, pp. 84-85).

Industrialization was bringing about the destruction of nature and this issue was in contrast with Romanticism's interest in the natural world. It was observed that the maintenance of nature decreased more as the industry became sturdier. This issue led to an awful dilapidation of the environment from diverse facets. Litter and toxic waste were able to slowly put an end to what the world had formerly well-maintained for centuries. Many have lately come to realize what a threat the world is expecting if this degradation continues. Romantic poets liked the nature owing to its remarkable effect on the artists. Romantics were suspicious of the urban world, and believed in human beings' close association with nature. In fact, such a relationship was essential for Romantics to be spiritually and ethically healthy (Day, 1996, pp. 3-4).

So, admiration of nature was a key feature in Romanticism. Thus, such a theory as ecocriticism which focuses chiefly on the relationship between literature and nature is an apt approach to analyze Romantic poems. In *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), it is declared that "ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (p. xviii). Lawrence Buell (2009) has also defined ecocriticism "as [a] study of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis" (p. 430). Lord Byron was strongly keen on nature and believed in it as the only proficient thing which could result in a closer relationship between humankind and God. Hubbell (2017) notes:

As Byron earned his way into Greek culture, he began to perceive the interdependencies of nature and culture and developed a bioregionalist understanding of how "second nature"—human culture, particularly the built environment—evolves from its specific nonhuman environment, or "first nature." Even in decline, the creative energies of first nature feed cultural practices such as hospitality, while the metabolic energies collected in buildings and monuments seep back into the ground like sap in winter, conserving creative energy for the future. (p. 106)

As the subject of analysis in this essay, "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" has three stanzas and starts with Byron's description of pathless woods which is teemed with peace and pleasure. Byron compares the natural world with the busy life of cities and notes that no one disrupts your solitude while you are enjoying the sea with its pleasant music. He loves both the nature and human beings, but nature is more preferable because here he can intermingle with the world and feel closer to it, giving him a feeling that he cannot explain in words. The society he mentions in the third line is not a society which consists of people. This kind of society consists of the narrator and the natural resources which is superior. Finally, Byron refers to his bottomless assembly with the nature as the single way by which he is capable of grasping humankind's resolution in the world accurately.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

"There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Woods" is a part which belongs to Byron's well-known *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. As a lengthy poem, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is about the journeys and replications of a melancholic young man, who is disappointed and searches for pleasure in remote areas. The imageries in this poem are semi-biographical since Byron produced some of the narrative under the influence of his own experiences throughout his explorations in "Portugal, the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea between 1809 and 1811" (Heffernan, 2006, p. 163). As a reflection of Byron's feelings concerning nature and society, this poem contains a character that rejects his society and humankind in search for pleasure in nature. In the second stanza, Byron addresses natural resources like the blue ocean and asks it to roll on which signifies the ocean's authority. Although the narrator is mad at human beings because of ruining the earth, he is contented that the ocean is out of humankind's control. Throughout the last lines, Byron mentions the abundant damages that humankind has gone through in a pursuit to apprehend the ocean more aptly. These lines are meant to represent the humanity's inability to appreciate the nature.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelt, uncoffined, and unknown.

In the third stanza, the narrator is still addressing the ocean and says that the ocean is different from other natural beauties. When human beings go to the ocean, the ocean arises and shakes them. Humanity's dreadful power to abolish natural resources on the earth is loathed by the ocean which can get rid of those who try to travel on it as fast as it wishes. Thus, human beings have no power when they encounter the ocean.

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.

As it was discussed, every line of this poem was about Byron's obsession with nature and its relationship with humanity. The way Byron addresses natural resources signifies his attitude toward nature as if it is a living thing. Just like any Romantic poet, he also respects nature and celebrates its numerous features. This is why Lovejoy (1924) states:

Most poets of the Romantic era discuss in varying depth, the function of nature in earning significant vision into the human position. The romantic poets believe nature as if it some kind of living survival calls made for nature to release the conflict and carry their ideas widely. Romantic poets adore nature and enjoy in its different aspects. Romantic's poets focus on the spook of nature in art and language and the observation of dignity through a connection with nature. (p. 232)

It is inferred that the ecocritical aspects in Lord Byron's poetry make his poems be full of imageries which are taken from his appreciation of the natural world. A fundamental concern of Byron's work is depicting the way by which human beings are teemed with both delight and revitalization from their collaborations with nature. After technology and industrialization isolated human beings from a close connection with nature by giving them relief and easy solutions to conquer previous tough problems, Byron saw the necessity to write about the environmental care and protection.

6. CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" by Lord Byron from an ecocritical perspective. Ecocriticism was stated to be a theory which copes with the interminable industrial and machine-driven annihilations in the nature. The main preoccupation of ecocriticism is thus to look after natural resources and ecology in order to stop the undesirable impacts on human life. This is why it is defined as "the field of enquiry that analyzes and promotes works of art which raise moral questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations" (Gomides, 2006, p. 14).

The methodology of this essay was based on the viewpoints of Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. It was written that Byron as a distinguished Romantic poet was extensively interested in the natural world and its relationship with human beings. Although his poetry has been analyzed through various approaches, no study could be found regarding the investigation of this specific poem through the lens of the ecocriticism theory. Thus, the present research was an attempt to fill the existing gap by a detailed scrutiny. Romanticism, which emphasized the role of feelings and eccentricity, nostalgia of nature, and disbelief in science, was somewhat opposed to the Industrial Revolution. In other words, the literary figures of this movement were all against modernity.

The Industrial Revolution affected practically every facet of everyday life. Everything was more developed and machines took the place of many human beings in factories. This revolution also influenced the environment since the population began to increase, leading to the exhaustion of natural assets and pollution as the result of the endless hunger of humankind. This issue caused human beings to find more pleasure in cities and get more isolated from the nature which signified the weakened faith in God. It was also found that Byron wrote "There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood" in order to discuss his concern for nature. Byron would refer to the close relationship between nature and human beings by exemplifying nature as molded and affected by humankind's doings; in all portrayals of nature, Byron showed nature as being abounded with human constructions.

This is why he believed that nature and humans were inexorably intertwined. Byron would think of nature as an authoritative accompaniment which was essential to human sentiments and development. He also assumed that natural splendor was generally more desirable than the glitches made by human beings. It is ultimately concluded that highlighting the important role of nature and its diverse features by Romantic poets made this period as an impending foundation for countless ecocritics whose obsession is the reciprocated relationship between man and nature and the ways through which one can avoid nature from tragedies by human beings. For Byron, nature did not only provide human beings with a diversion from memory, but also a source of new energy. In other words, fascination in nature looks to be 'nothing less than a personal redemption (Bone, 2004, pp. 120, 123).

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Appendix

"There Is Pleasure in the Pathless Wood"

by Lord Byron

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown.

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
And howling, to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth:—there let him lay.