



The Genre of Dark Romanticism

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Abstract : This study is an attempt to highlight the salient features of dark romanticism, also highlighting its most eminent writers and bringing about a contrast in their writing methodology and viewpoints, with respect to other writers.

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Dark romanticism is a literary sub genre of romanticism, reflecting popular fascination with irrational, the demonic and grotesque. Often confused with Gothicism, it had shadows romantic movement felt its 18th century beginning. Edgar Allan Poe is the supreme exponent of this tradition. Romanticism valued emotions, beliefs as more important facts or logic and individuality comes first worshipping nature where is dark romanticism was different from them emphasising on human fallibility.

Keywords: Sub genre, Irrational, Demonic, Grotesque, Gothicism, and Exponent.

Introduction

During 18th and 19th century, national literature of various Western countries went through an evolution of different movements. The Dark Romanticism which was the literary sub genre of Romanticism exploded into the existence during these movements. Dark Romanticism was such a perennial possibility within the broader movement in both literature and art. Like romanticism, Dark Romanticism began in Germany with an intense fascination with melancholia, insanity, crime and shady atmosphere. It involved ghosts and ghouls, the grotesque and irrational. “Dark romanticism emphasised on emotions and individualism, as well as glorification of all the past and nature, referring to medieval rather than the classical. Dark romanticism was given such a form grotesque”, by literary theorist Mario Praz in his lengthy study of the genre published in 1930, 'The romantic age'. (1)

According to the critic G R Thomson, “Romantics adopted the images of anthropomorphised Evil in the form of Saturn devil, ghosts, Werewolves, vampires and Ghosts as emblematic of human nature”. (2)

He sums up the characteristics of the sub genre, writing:

“Fallen man's inability fully to comprehend Haunting reminders of another Supernatural real and that yet seems not to exist, the constant perplexity of inexplicable and vastly metaphysical phenomena, a propensity for seemingly purpose or Evil moral... A sense of nameless guilt combined with suspicion on the external world was delusive projection of the mind these were the major elements and the vision of man the dark romantics opposed to the mainstream of romantic thought.” (3)

According to the dark romantics even good men and women drift towards sin and self destruction and there can be unintended consequences that arise from well intended social reforms.

Dark Romanticism and Transcendentalism

Dark romanticism also emerged from Transcendentalist movement in the 19th century America, who felt perfection and their own divinity as innate qualities of mankind and dark romantics believed that humans gravitate to evil and self the general. The genre dealt with realism on fallibility of sin, psychological effects of guilt and sin. The ever Dark Side of the romantics is the inclusion of Gothic literature that involves sheer terror, personal torment, graphic morbidity and the supernatural.

The Transcendental philosophical movement was protest against the general state culture and Society at the time. They believed in the intellectualism at Howard and the doctrines of Unitarian church. The belief, that an ideal, spiritual state 'transcends' the physical and empirical forms only through individual initiation and not by religious norms.



Dark Romanticism and Puritanism-

The genre of the Dark Romantics was wielded as an act of rebellion by its exponents against the strict religious system of Puritans. Dark Romanticism rebelled against the Puritans, who came to America for religious freedom, but they had no separation between religious rules and state laws.

Dark romanticism in relation to Gothic fiction-

Gothic fiction was very popular during late 18th 19th century known for its inclusion of its many conventions in the romantic works. Depiction originated with Horace Walpole, 'the Castle of Otranto', in 1764 work of this genre, included terror with the usage of macabre, supernatural haunted structures and search for identity. Dark romantic writers took the Supernatural elements, combined it with their theme of darkness comprising of Sin, guilt etc. And created themes of dark mystery and scepticism regarding man, where earlier British authors writing within the movement of romanticism, like Lord Byron, Samuel Coleridge, Mary Shelley and John Polidori are sometimes referred to as dark romantics, with their tales and poems commonly featuring outcast from society, personal torment and uncertainty as to whether the values of man will bring salvation or destruction.

Other notable Romantic Authors-

Many American writers are considered as dark romantic writers including

1. Edgar Allan Poe
2. Nathaniel Hawthorne and
3. Herman Melville.

Edgar Allan Poe is considered seminal Dark Romantic writer with much of his poetry and prose featuring in characteristic interest of exploring the psychology of man, including forwards and self destructive nature of conscious and subconscious mind.

Some of his Dark Romantic works include short stories like-

1. Ligeia
 - 2 The Fall of the house of Usher
- and the poems:
3. The Raven
 4. Ulalume

His most recurring theme dealt with the questions of death including its physical signs, the effects of decomposition, concerns of premature burial, the reanimation of the dead and morning. (4)

Herman Melville- Herman Melville is best known for his travel books, 'Moby Dick's, 'Bartleby the Scrivener' is among his highly regarded work. With respect to Dark Romanticism, his theme dealt with man's blind ambition, cruelty and defence of God along with Madness, mystery and triumph of Evil over good.

Nathaniel Hawthorne-

Nathaniel Hawthorne was a Dark romantic writer with close ties to the American Transcendental movement. Though he lived with the community at the Brook farm Transcendentalist Utopian Commune, but was troubled by the movement and became anti-Transcendentalist. His short stories included 'the minstrel's black Veil', 'Mud kips of Fire'. These were the cautionary tales about the extremes of individualism and reliance on human beings and hold guilt and sin as the inherit qualities in a man. (5)

Prominent examples of dark romantic works-

1. Tell tale heart, in 1843, by Edgar Allan Poe
2. The birthmark, in 1843, by Nathaniel Hawthorne
3. The minstrel's black Veil, in 1843, by Nathaniel Hawthorne
4. Moby Dick, in 1851, by Herman Melville
5. Bartleby the Scrivener, in 1856, by Herman Melville



6. Ligea, in 1838, by Edgar Allan Poe
7. Dreamland, in 1844, by Edgar Allan Poe
8. The Raven, in 1845, by Edgar Allan Poe
9. Ulalume, in 1847, by Edgar Allan Poe

Conclusion

The American writers were most prominent with your work between 1830-1865 writing in the genre, where two opposing sub genre emerged: the optimistic, who believed in human goodness and spirituality (grew in transcendental movement) and the pessimists, who embraced human fallibility and the inclination towards something (the dark romantic movement). The Dark Romantics drawn to Dark Side of human psyche, The Evil side of spiritual truth. They rebelled against the Puritans, who came to the country and imposed their own religion and societal rules. American writers, like Nathaniel Hawthorne criticized the search persecutions of the Puritans. The work of these the Romantic Writers were also influenced by Transcendentalists, but they did not embrace the ideas of Transcendental movement. The dark romantic works are notably less optimistic then Transcendental text on mankind, nature and divinity, so was the case with romanticism, whose writings were characterized by flair, extravagance imagination, individual experience and their concept of sublime as an ecstatic experience of emotion. In reaction to nature, the dark romantics views things in much more sinister form, concentrating upon the themes of horror, tragedy, the macabre and supernatural. The success of this movement also relies on the fact that the human psyche is attached in a subtle way to the fear, pain and tragedy that leads to the birth of Gothic style and his influence music and art.

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