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Finding Inspiration in Darkness: The Exploration of Obscurity in Romanticism through the Works of Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

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Honors Thesis

Finding Inspiration in Darkness

The Exploration of Obscurity in Romanticism

through the Works of Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Introduction

In this thesis, I am exploring the usage of the themes of darkness and obscurity in Romanticism and how it functions as a contrast against the Enlightenment period. For the purpose of this thesis, I chose to conduct research into British and Spanish Romanticism, since those are the regions I have focused on during my undergraduate studies. I decided to write about this topic because there are prominent images of darkness and the unknown within the writings of Romanticism. It is common to group all of the dark or strange aspects of Romanticism into the subcategories “Dark Romanticism” or “Gothic,” but these themes are clearly seen throughout Romanticism as a whole. While it would be easy to combine the clearest examples of these themes into a subcategory, it diminishes what the movement was trying to promote as a whole. One of the motives of Romanticism was to maintain the presence of inexplicable qualities in society without forsaking the mysteriousness that lent itself to the beauty of these themes. As I read further into the works of Romantic authors in British and Spanish literature, it was clear that there was a thread that connected these themes to the movement that dominated Europe from the end of the 17th century to the beginning of the 19th century: the Enlightenment.

During the 19th century, there was a movement away from the extreme intellectual and scientific pursuits of the Enlightenment period. Romanticism was born out of a time when some writers were jaded by the constant pursuit of knowledge and loss of traditions in society. Religion and *ars poetica* were forfeited for scientific pursuits. The Enlightenment period celebrated uncovering the unknown and promoting the image that rationalization was the superior mindset. Romanticism was a dramatic rejection of the ideals that the Enlightened thinkers endorsed. Whereas the Enlightenment celebrated bringing things to light and unveiling

the unknown, Romanticism was a lover of the dark and obscure. Romantic writers idealized the unknown because they believed that there was an innate beauty that only lived in the darkness. The love that the Romantic writers felt for these concepts can be seen throughout their works of literature. Romanticists did not only find inspiration in the light; rather, they appreciated the sublime beauty of the unknown. In her essay “Romanticism: Breaking the Canon,” Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer wrote that:

The thrill of terror replaced the pang of consciousness. In the celebrated preface to his play *Cromwell* (1827), Victor Hugo praised at length the aesthetic category of the grotesque, host to the ugly and the evil, and the antithesis to the sublime and the beautiful. In its marginality and opposition to the canon, the grotesque encapsulated not only the aesthetic and the spirit, but also the very counter-discursive (and "counter-culture") essence of Romantic modernism.

(p.20)

Romanticism flourished throughout many parts of the world because the movement encapsulated some of the most intriguing aspects of the human experience. Religion, tradition, and the unexplainable regained importance that had been lost during the Enlightenment. Romantic writers sought to restore the balance by writing about the importance of these themes.

Darkness and Mystery in Romanticism

While there is a branch off of Romanticism called “Dark Romanticism” that is heavily influenced by dark images, the qualities of darkness and strangeness are not confined to this particular sector of the movement. Romanticism is comprised of dark symbols and the incomprehensible. People often inaccurately associate darkness with grotesque. Often, darkness

and the unknown are feared because they are not easy to explain. The unfamiliarity with the unknown generally makes people uncomfortable, which is part of the reason why there are negative connotations with each term. Romanticism breaks that tradition by celebrating each of these traits, rather than focusing on only the light elements in the world. The unknown has a large part in the creation of what is understood as Romanticism. Charles Edwyn Vaughn wrote on the revolutionary aspects of Romantic literature across Europe in his book *The Romantic Revolt*. He defines the term Romanticism as:

In the wider and less definite sense, they may be used to signify that revolt from the purely intellectual view of man's nature, that recognition of the rights of the emotions, the instincts and the passions, that vague intimation of sympathy between man and the world around him- in one word, that sense of mystery which, with more or less clearness of utterance, inspires all that is best, all that is most characteristic, in the literature of the last half of the eighteenth century; whether, in the stricter and more familiar sense of the term, it is to be called "romantic" or no. (p.4).

Vaughn believed that Romanticism is defined by the sublime, mysterious qualities that can be found in the raw, natural world. Nature, intangible feelings, and spirituality are all themes in Romanticism. Romantics believed that mankind can uncover many truths about itself by giving its mind and soul over to the unknown. On the other hand, if people did not learn how to incorporate dark aspects into their lives, they would perish. In poems like "Darkness" by Lord Byron, the inability to cope with the unexplainable leads to the demise of mankind. Byron wrote:

The brows of men by the despairing light
Wore an unearthly aspect, as by fits
The flashes fell upon them; some lay down
And hid their eyes and wept; and some did rest
Their chins upon their clenched hands, and smiled; (“Darkness”, lines 22-26).

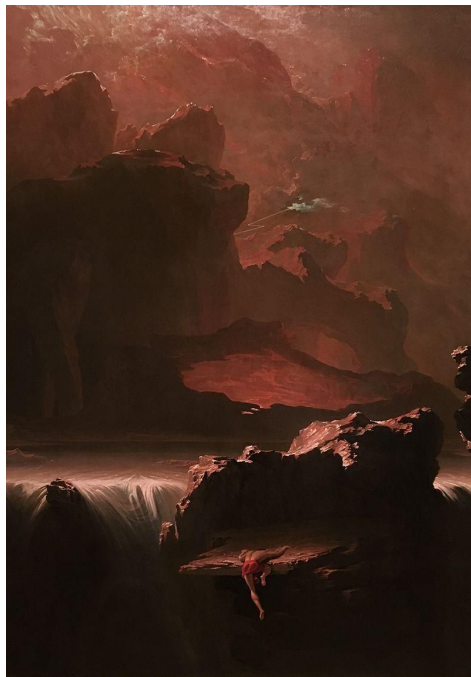
These reactions are indicative of a culture that had not adapted to darkness. Some people sobbed, paralyzed by the darkness and unable to cope. Other people gave themselves over to the madness and simply smiled at the destruction of mankind. To a Romantic writer, if humans can accept the unknown, they will be able to unlock a deeper understanding of the natural world.

Romanticism throughout the Nations

Romanticism existed throughout many different continents, with each nation having its own interpretation of the movement. The cultural differences led to a variation in forms of Romanticism, while still maintaining the general theme of the movement. Within the themes of darkness and obscurity, British and Spanish Romanticism share a strong interest. For the sake of clarity and conciseness, I will be exploring these themes within the poetic works of two authors: Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. These authors are able to represent each of the movements in their own respective countries, in addition to representing the difference in time when these authors were writing. George Gordon Byron, or Lord Byron, was born in 1788 and lived until 1824. He was an early writer during the Romantic movement that slightly overlapped and succeeded the Enlightenment period. His poems focus more on the concept of darkness and traditions, while Bécquer’s works were steeped in the unknown. Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer was born in 1836 and lived until 1870. Bécquer lived during the middle and end of Romanticism in

the entire scope of the movement throughout the world. Spain modernized at a slower rate than Britain and Germany, which led to Romanticism entering into the Spanish literary world several decades later. Bécquer's earlier poems in *Rimas* explored the role of the unknown and inspiration in art, while the later poems contained darker themes such as death and melancholy.

While there are clear preferences between the two authors, they both include many of the same images in their works. During their lifetimes, there were several writers, artists, and thinkers that created works that coincided with the same belief that there was a need for a revolution to move away from the Enlightenment. The themes of darkness, obscurity, and tradition that Bécquer and Byron explored in their poems can be seen in art of the time, such as the works of John Martin and Francisco de Goya. The Romantic eye looked towards darkness and the inexplicable, but not for the purpose of uncovering their deepest meanings.



¹ *Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion* by John Martin

Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer are important to study because they are Romantic giants in the literary world. They both died relatively young, but they wrote timeless works that are still studied today. Lord Byron was familiar with Spanish literature as he wrote an English interpretation of *Don Juan*, a Spanish play. Daniel G. Samuels wrote a lengthy essay examining the relationship of Byron and various Spanish authors in which he said,

Hendrix has shown that Bécquer revealed an interest in Byron when he published *Imitación de Byron* in *El Nene* December 17, 1859, and that a number of later *Rimas* bear a relationship, either in thought or theme, with some of Byron's poems. Though Bécquer in various cases seemingly caught the Byronic spirit indirectly from Spanish romanticists and later journalists, a certain similarity between both poets is undeniable. (p.290)

While Byron lived some years before Bécquer, Byron's influence had seeped into Spanish culture and helped to perpetuate Spanish Romanticism. There are curious allusions to Byron in some of Bécquer's works. For example, the concept of the unmarked grave. Lord Byron has a poem titled "To Time" where the last lines of the poem says, "And I can smile to think how weak / Thine efforts shortly shall be shown, / When all the vengeance thou canst wreak / Must fall upon--- a nameless stone" ("To Time", lines 37-40). Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer would later go on to write a poem in his collection of *Rimas* called "Rima LXVI". In this poem, he says, "en donde esté una piedra solitaria / sin inscripción alguna, / donde habite el olvido, / allí estará mi tumba" ("Rima LXVI", lines 13-16). This is just one example of the similarities between the works of Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer. While the authors were nations

and oceans apart from each other, the thread of Romanticism linked the two authors together which led to similarities within their works.



Subtle Illumination as Inspiration

The world surrounding the Romantic movement was bleak, despite the Enlightenment period that had spanned for years prior to the Romantic period. The dark themes that are seen in the Romantic period are a revolt against the Enlightenment. Romanticism abhorred the over-exaggeration of enlightened thinking and reverted back into the unknown as a relief from the constant illumination. The symbols within Romanticism celebrate tiny sparks of inspiration rather than the overwhelming brightness of the Enlightenment period. If each movement was an image, then the Enlightenment period would be a blazing sun and Romanticism would be an endless, starry night sky. One of the most dominant symbols within the Romantic period are stars. In Lord Byron's poem "She Walks in Beauty" he says, "She walks in beauty, like the night

² *El sueño de la razón* (The sleep of reason produces monsters) de Francisco de Goya

/ Of cloudless climes and starry skies” (“She Walks in Beauty”, lines 1-2). Rather than the subject of the poem being flooded with the light of the sun, she is represented by stars. Stars seem to be an image that metaphorically contrasts against the image of the suns. Stars are less obtrusive than the sun with their light, whereas the sun is often blinding. When looking at these symbols as representing Romanticism and the Enlightenment period, it is clear to see which type of enlightened thinking each period preferred.

Non-traditional Beauty as the Ideal

The appreciation of strange beauty is important in Romantic literature. Traditional beauty was left behind as the Romantics strove to embody lesser known, more obscure forms of beauty. Strange beauty in the Romantic period is surrounded in the dark and is inexplicable. Mysteriousness was considered an attractive quality in these works. The ideal beauty wears a shroud of darkness that entices mankind with mysteriousness and the need to control the beauty. In “Rima I” by Bécquer, for example, the speaker seeks to dominate and explain the strange, beautiful hymn. The speaker says, “Yo sé un himno gigante y extraño / que anuncia en la noche del alma una aurora,” (“Rima I”, lines 1-2) and then continues on saying “Yo quisiera escribirle, del hombre / domando el rebelde, mezquino idioma,” (“Rima I”, lines 5-6). Several of the poems describe the desire to uncover the truth, but they acknowledge that the mysterious beauty should be maintained rather than destroyed. Often, the mysterious “being” has power over mankind, not the opposite. In Spanish Romanticism specifically, the authors wrote about the poetic beauty of the unattainable ideal. This ideal beauty was unattainable not because of its innate perfection; rather, the imperfect and indescribable was intangible and therefore unattainable.

The Unknown and Tradition

The theme of the inexplicable extends to religion as well. Many people during the Enlightenment period turned away from religion in favor of logic and reason. Religion requires absolute faith in something that cannot be seen or touched, which means it cannot be proven or disproven by scientists. While the Romantic writers were not all necessarily religious, there are themes of religion and reverence in some of the works during this time. In his essay, Klaus Peter wrote:

“At the same time they renounced the optimism of the Enlightenment: the future now seemed to them to be blocked off. Disappointed by the course of history, they no longer searched for positive alternatives to the present in the future, but rather in the past. History now appeared as a history of decay, the result of original sin. In the end the idealized past was the past before man had fallen from grace. But the revolution, which now was expected to change the course of history, was beyond the means of man. Only God, so it seemed, could bring back what was lost: paradise” (196).

This follows the idea that the Romantics did not shy away from concepts that they did not understand. The works that deal with religious themes do not necessarily correlate with the authors being pious; rather, the qualities of darkness and obscurity that the Romantics appreciated could be seen in religious terms. On the other hand, they did not try to uncover absolute truth from the inexplicable, such as religion. T.A Burkill wrote an essay in which he analyzed the role of religion in a post-Enlightenment era. He says that:

“THE doctrine that knowledge of ultimate reality in religious apprehension is communicated through the mediation of a non-intellectual faculty already comes to expression in the *Pensées* of Pascal:- "Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait point." "C'est le coeur qui sent Dieu, et non la raison. Voilà ce que c'est que la foi: Dieu sensible au coeur, non à la raison." Thus Pascal sets forth the romanticist thesis that reason has nothing to do with the deep intimations of the worshipping soul. Religion is an affair of the heart, and the productive Source of all things cannot be comprehended by the exercise of the finite intellect” (318).

This passage gives a great example of the generally expressed belief that the Romanticists did not value the hyper-logical and rational mindset of the Enlightenment period. In order to support this belief, Romantic writers used themes and images of darkness and obscurity to give a mystic quality back to religion.

The Purpose of Romanticism

The illogical and inexplicable that had been abhorred during the Enlightenment period were once again the center of many works in Romanticism. Many authors saw the merit of these themes as a way to return to a simpler time when logic and reason did not reign supreme. While Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer were both parts of the same movement, their works utilized the themes in different ways to support their causes. The differing usages helped to reinforce the validity of Romanticism as a movement away from the era of logic and reason. Romanticism is the direct repulsion of the Enlightenment period and the inclusion of themes such as darkness and the obscure attempted to restore the balance between reason and inspiration.

Chapter I: Lord Byron

The Power of Darkness in Lord Byron's "Darkness"

Lord Byron wrote several works that explored darkness which include "To Time" and "And Thou Art Dead, As Young and Fair", but one of the poems that stood out has darkness as its namesake. The poem titled "Darkness" explores the concepts of darkness and the demise of humanity. "Darkness" highlights the rise and fall of civilization as a direct result of darkness enshrouding the Earth. This poem can be interpreted as a representation of the destruction of society that the Romantics feared would happen as a result of the Enlightenment. The poem begins with the famous line, "I had a dream, which was not all a dream" ("Darkness", line 1), that indicates that the speaker was seeing aspects of his dreams come to fruition in his actual life. The dark reality in the poem was not Byron's reality at the time that he wrote the poem; rather, it was a prediction of the soon-to-be reality that would follow the end of the Enlightenment. The speaker goes on to explain that "The bright sun was extinguish'd" ("Darkness", line 2) and the stars had lost their paths in the darkness. After setting the tone for the poem, the speaker describes how humans dealt with the darkness. The speaker says that, "Morn came and went and came, and brought no day, / And men forgot their passions in the dread" ("Darkness, lines 6-7). This section highlights the dependence that mankind had developed for the light. Instead of adapting to the darkness, men left their passions to die. At this point, readers are led to believe that the darkness is malicious and causes people to fall into a state of desolation.

Religion has an important part in the poem, though its representation is not immediately obvious when reading the poem. During the Enlightenment, there was a movement away from

the strict religious observance that characterized the past. In its quest for the logical, mankind forgot about religion because it cannot be explained rationally. This was met by strong disapproval from the Romanticists, who upheld traditions of the past. "Darkness" has a reverent tone towards religion and darkness itself. The first time that religious vocabulary is used is in the ninth line of the poem when the speaker says, "and all hearts / Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light:"("Darkness", line 9). The use of the word "selfish" and "prayer" is interesting because it leads readers to believe that humans did not turn to religion before when the light existed, but selfishly begged for the light when it was gone. In the King James Version of the Bible, the scripture says:

"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand and no man regarded;/ But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: / I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; / When your fear comes as desolation and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you; / Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (King James Version, Proverbs 1:24-1:27).

Lord Byron would have likely been familiar with the Bible and this section is mirrored in his poem, even down to the word "desolation". The similarities between the Bible and "Darkness" help reinforce the notion that the poem has a reverent, underlying message. In the this passage of the Bible, God says that he will not reply the the pleas of mankind after it had forsaken him. The setting in "Darkness" is a world filled with desolation and fear with no savior

to restore the peace. Mankind had extended itself beyond the reach of God, and therefore God could not reach it in its hour of need.

Religion does not get mentioned for much of the poem until the end, when readers are able to see the irreverence of mankind again. The speaker says:

they met beside

The dying embers of an altar-place

Where had been heap'd a mass of holy things

For an unholy usage; they rak'd up,

And shivering scrap'd with their cold skeleton hands

The feeble ashes, and their feeble breath

Blew for a little life, and made a flame

Which was a mockery; then they lifted up

Their eyes as it grew lighter, and beheld

Each other's aspects saw, and shriek'd, and died... ("Darkness", lines 57-66).

At this point in the poem, humans had burned everything on the earth for light. They had burned the altar, where men used to worship. They gathered together all the relics that had once been sacred and used them as fuel to light a fire to see each other. The fire that they created "was a mockery" ("Darkness, line 64). The quote mentioned earlier from the Bible used similar vocabulary, including the word "mocking". The effort that the men put forth to create light once more was met by a weak response. In this dim light, humans were able to see each other and they died because of the hideousness of what they saw. The use of religion in this poem "Darkness" is relevant because of the historical connotations of men forgetting religion in favor of

Enlightenment. In his article on politics and Romanticism, Klaus Peter writes, "The greatest theme of Baader's life was the restoration of morality, which, in his opinion, was alone capable of preventing the decay of society and its revolutionary destruction. In particular, he felt it was necessary to restore religion" (204). The unfamiliarity and the innate irrationality of religion caused mankind to move away from it in favor of things that can be easily explained. Religion is obscure and should not be dissected, which is something Byron's poem explained.

Fear of the darkness that enshrouded the world led to the destruction of humanity, but it also negatively influenced the natural world. Romantic writers celebrated the rawness and wildness of nature because it was pure from human interference. The Industrial Revolution had taken hold during the same time that Romanticism was developing. As a result, cities grew larger and resources were used for the new manufacturing of products. The Enlightenment period had initiated more research into the economy and pushed society further into a new age. Klaus Peter goes on to write, "One of the merits of Romanticism was its awareness of the problems of industrialization. In the early nineteenth century, these problems became more and more apparent, even in Germany. Romanticism, guided by its specific interest, the criticism of modern times, reacted much more strongly to these problems than did the liberal bourgeoisie, which tended to dismiss them" (203). In "Darkness", mankind sought out the light so much that it razed the earth. The relief from the darkness was only temporary, as society consumed all the resources that were left. The speaker says, "A fearful hope was all the world contain'd; / Forests were set on fire but hour by hour / They fell and faded and the crackling trunks / Extinguish'd with a crash and all was black" ("Darkness", lines 18-21). Humans destroyed the natural resources around them to create light, but that light eventually burned out and all that was left in the world was

ashes. There is a sense of wildness in nature, which mankind cannot fully comprehend.

Romantics would argue that mankind should not seek out full comprehension of natural phenomena; rather, they should embrace the unexplainable as a relief from the scientific world.

The resolution of the poem describes the aftermath of man creating false light. The speaker says:

The world was void,
The populous and the powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless
A lump of death- a chaos of hard clay.
The rivers, lakes and ocean all stood still,
And nothing stirr'd within their silent depths; ("Darkness, lines 69-74).

The selfish desire for light that humans had in the poem caused them to destroy the natural world. Seeking out the light, or the Enlightenment, led to an irreverence of nature. The light was worthless in the end because there was no beauty left to see. While the world was illuminated for a short period of time due to the efforts of men, the light ultimately would be extinguished and darkness would encompass the world again. Rather than accepting darkness and living in a world that is more difficult to understand, the humans destroyed the earth for a brief moment of enlightenment.

One of the most poignant parts of this poem is at the end. There is a sense of finality and calmness that Byron created in the midst of the madness. The last four lines say, "The moon, their mistress, had expir'd before; / The winds were wither'd in the stagnant air, / And the clouds perish'd; Darkness had no need / Of aid from them-She was the Universe!" ("Darkness", lines 79-82). Byron does a lot in these last four lines, including personifying darkness in which

darkness takes on a god-like persona. The familiar world and celestial bodies perished, but Darkness lived on. The speaker states that “She was the Universe!” (“Darkness”, line 82), which implied that Darkness existed before mankind and will never completely disappear. Darkness did not need to be understood by humans in order to exist. This supports the claim that the poem was in opposition to the Enlightenment because darkness did not need the explanations and definitions of mankind in order to exist. Darkness existed before rationalization and will continue to exist after humans are no longer around to rationalize the inexplicable.

Finding Beauty in Darkness in Lord Byron’s poem “She Walks in Beauty”

Another poem by Lord Byron that implicitly celebrates darkness is “She Walks in Beauty.” This is one of the most popular poems by Lord Byron. On the surface, this is a love poem directed to a woman who is ethereally beautiful. When viewing through the lens of a Romantic eye, there are themes that coincide with the darker aspects of Romanticism. Whereas darkness was not personified until the end of the poem in “Darkness,” Byron immediately humanizes darkness in “She Walks in Beauty.” Darkness takes on positive qualities in the poem. Anthony Synnott wrote that “Byron himself wrote a famous poem that begins: 'She walks in beauty, like the night/ Of cloudless climes and starry skies'; and concludes in the by now familiar strains of the beauty mystique, equating beauty and goodness” (625). In addition to making these aspects positive, the gender of the subject is female which is indicated by the pronouns “she” and “her” throughout the poem. Darkness is softened in this poem. The first stanza says:

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes:
Thus mellowed to that tender light

Which heaven to gaudy day denies. ("She Walks in Beauty", lines 1-6)

Immediately, darkness is in league with beauty as Byron beautifies darkness and gives it a feminine form. The combination of feminine beauty and darkness is important because it breaks the barrier of expectations for both traditional beauty and darkness. The line "And all that's best of dark and bright" ("Darkness", line 3) does not necessarily mean darkness and light; rather, there is the possibility that it could mean darkness and intelligence as a translation of the word "bright." The last two lines of this stanza are important because they present a strong opposition to light. The speaker appreciates mellowed light, like that of the stars, over the extreme brightness of the day. According to the speaker, heaven does not give the same amount of beauty to the day, preferring the subdued beauty of darkness.

Byron understood that there was a need for a balance of light and darkness within the poem. The important idea here is that the poem does place more value on the unknown and the darkness rather than the light and the rational. The incarnation of beauty in this poem is mysterious and beautiful for the darkness and unexplainable aspects of her presence. The second stanza describes the careful balance of light and dark saying:

One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impaired the nameless grace

Which waves in every raven tress,
Or softly lightens o'er her face;
Where thoughts serenely sweet express,
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place ("Darkness", lines 7-12).

The balance of light and dark is significant in this stanza because of the descriptions of the light and darkness. The light is not overpowering, rather it is soft and unobtrusive. This softness lends itself to the feminine beauty mentioned before. Another key detail to note is the color of the woman's hair in the poem. Byron made the artistic decision to use "raven" hair rather than the traditional blond hair that characterized beauty in during the Renaissance. In addition to using darkness in this poem, Lord Byron also used the theme of the inexplicable and unknown. The poem says that there is a "nameless grace" to the woman that would be diminished if the balance of light and dark were not maintained. The woman in "She Walks in Beauty" is the perfect physical representation of subtly illuminated and sublimely dark.

Chapter II: Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

Celebrating the Unknown in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's "Rima I"

The first poem in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer's *Rimas* encapsulates the theme of the entire collection and sets the tone for the remainder of the poems. The poem describes a hymn that cannot be deciphered by mankind, but represents absolute beauty and perfection. The poem begins with "Yo sé un himno gigante y extraño / que anuncia en la noche del alma una aurora" ("Rima I", lines 1-2). Readers are given the knowledge that the hymn is giant and strange from the beginning. Paul Ilie wrote about Bécquer's obsession with the inexplicable, saying, "Thus, the solid roots of Bécquer's Romantic imagination permit at least one tendril to grow in a new direction. Creative activity includes the cultivation of dissonance as well as harmony, meaninglessness as well as understanding, and deformation as well as verisimilitude" (316). The interesting part of this quote is that the Ilie chooses to use the words "harmony" and "dissonance". These words describe "Rima I" perfectly because the poem describes a harmony filled with dissent. The second line of the poem says that the hymn announces the coming of dawn to the soul's night. This gives the impression that while the hymn is strange and imposing, it is soothing to the listeners. The speaker goes on to say "Yo quisiera escribirle, del hombre / domando el rebelde mezquino idioma" ("Rima I", lines 5-6). In these two verses, Bécquer captures the human experience during the Enlightenment period. The speaker would like to write down the hymn in order to materialize it. The use of the phrase "del hombre" makes the drive to rationalize the unknown a human characteristic. The next line says that the hymn is a strange, rebel language that the speaker wants to dominate. This domination of the unknown or the

strange is characteristic of mankind throughout the years within different cultures, beliefs, and natural occurrences. The speaker wants to dissect the hymn to understand how it functions and the beauty, but the beauty of the hymn is that it is inexplicable.

At the end of the poem, the speaker says that the hymn is indescribable saying, “Pero en vano es luchar, que no hay cifras / capaz de encerrarle, y apenas ¡oh hermosa! / Si teniendo en mis manos las tuyas, / Pudiera, al oído, cantártelo a solas” (“Rima I”, lines 9-12). This last stanza creates a sense of finality in the incapability of the speaker to interpret the hymn. The speaker says that the fight to understand the hymn is in vain because there are no ciphers to capture the hymn. This can be translated into a criticism of the Enlightenment, which sought out to completely capture and rationalize the unknown. The end of the poem says that beauty cannot be captured, but it can be appreciated in silence and wonder. This is an interesting, almost paradoxical work because the poem itself is trying to encapsulate the sacred hymn, but there is a moment of self awareness midway through the poem where the speaker realizes that he cannot contain the hymn in a poem. If readers view this through the critical lens of the Romantic period, the metaphor could be a method of stating that the Romantic writers who chose to not extrapolate the unknown were more self aware than the writers of the Enlightenment period.

The Balance of Inspiration and Logic in Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer’s “Rima III”

Another poem that highlights the balance of inspiration and rationalization of the unknown is in Bécquer’s “Rima III”. In this poem, Bécquer describes the constant battle between logic and inspiration. Logic is synonymous with light and control while inspiration is synonymous with mystery and unpredictability. This poem can be split into three separate parts, each detailing the aforementioned themes. Each section has incohesive stanzas that describe the

theme, which is revealed at the end of the section. The lack or inclusion of cohesiveness in the format of each section lends itself to supporting the argument for inspiration or reason. The first section defines the mysterious, inexplicable quality of inspiration. The second section highlights the controlling order that rationalization and logic has over inspiration. There is a balance of the two, rather than giving either side too much power. There are eight stanzas for both groups which gives them equal opportunities to describe the qualities of inspiration and logic. Each of the sections mimic the specific quality that they are describing in the formation of the verses. The first section is more disjointed than the second section. It is an overflow of thoughts and feelings, while the second section has more order to the layout. The second section can be followed easily, with threads of the same themes within the stanzas. The mirroring of the themes and the format of the sections help to reinforce the main point both subliminally and openly.

The first half of the poem mimics the process of inspired thinking, where thoughts interrupt consciousness with an interjection of passion. The first section is punctuated with the line “Tal es la inspiración” (“Rima III” line 33). The stanzas leading up to this line detail the inexplicable quality to inspiration. John H. Hartsook published works detailing Bécquer’s writing, saying “These images are not ordered by any logical process and are not subject to the control of the will. They float and stream haphazardly in that veiled dimness below the level of conscious cerebration which Bécquer calls *limbo* [. . .] His constant allusion to the vague and confused nature of these floating and hazy images has perhaps helped to give rise to the attribute of *vaguedad* so often ascribed to his style” (259). Hartsook argues that the unclear messages within Bécquer’s works lend themselves to the creative process of the Romantic spirit, as seen in “Rima III.” The first section of the poem begins with “Sacudimiento extraño/ que agita las ideas”

("Rima III", lines 1-2). The poem begins *in medias res*, with a strange jolt that ignites the mind.

The speaker goes on to say "Deformes siluetas / de seres imposibles" ("Rima III", lines 9-10).

Immediately, the reader is made aware of the almost supernatural quality of this poem.

Inspiration presents itself as deformed silhouettes of impossible beings, unable to be grasped or fully understood. Furthermore, one of the most important stanzas of the first section is the fifth

stanza which says, "ideas sin palabras / palabras sin sentido, / cadencias que no tienen / ni ritmo ni compás" ("Rima III", lines 17-20). This stanza describes the entire theme of the first section.

Inspiration in the mind of the Romantic writer is comprised of ideas without words and cadences that do not have a predictable pattern. This is the first of two mentions of a "cómpas" in the poem. In this setting, there is not a rhythm or pattern to guide inspiration. Inspiration does not follow a set logic; rather, the inspiration comes from a mysterious place without planning.

The last stanza before the poem breaks into the second section is: "Locura que el espíritu / exalta y desfallece, / embriaguez divina / del genio creador" ("Rima III", lines 29-32). This stanza wraps up the sentiments that Bécquer had about inspiration, as well as brings a new reverence to inspired thinking. This reverence is for the creative process as a savior, but creativity can be described as a certain type of madness. Ilie argues that, "However, we must not fail to note the prominence of distortion in Bécquer's notion of imagination, more from the standpoint of theory than of practice. Many of his remarks about fantasy are dominated by a concern for aberration and abnormality. These are not offered in any neurotic sense, but rather as an expression of how irrational factors can function independently within the creative mechanism" (314). Bécquer groups madness and inspiration in the same category, reinforcing the strangeness that surrounds what he believes is inspired thinking. Madness does not

necessarily mean that a person is insane. According to this poem, inspiration is the madness that exalts and falters the spirit. The speaker goes on to say that inspiration is the divine intoxication of the genius creator. Most of Bécquer's works do not feature a specific god like Byron did in many of his works, but giving a certain reverential quality to inspiration follows suit with the general Romantic promotion of worship. Where Byron made more specific allusions to religion in his works, Bécquer made the process of creating works of art a religious experience.

The second section is defined by the line "Tal es nuestra razón" ("Rima III", line 66). While many of the romantic works were passionate in their disdain against rationality because of its prominence during the Enlightenment period, this poem acknowledges that reason and logic can be useful in moderation. In this section of the poem, the stanzas describe the aspects of logic and reason that mirror the inspiration and mystery of the previous section. The first two stanzas in this second section announce the birth of reason, saying:

Gigante voz que el caos
ordena en el cerebro
y entre las sombras hace
la luz aparecer.

Brillante rienda de oro
que poderosa enfrena
de la exaltada mente
el volador corcel. ("Rima III", lines 34-41).

These stanzas express how dominating reason and logic were at the time. Logic enters into the poem as an imposing figure that organizes the chaos of the mind. The previous section outlines how the madness is actually a symptom of inspiration, which leads readers to believe that some inspiration is lost during rationalization. This can be interpreted as a way to say that the works during the Enlightenment were filled with logic, but the logical process was sterile and lacked passion. The last line of the first stanza describes how the light of logic and reason sweeps away the shadows that fill the mind, but the next stanza immediately mirrors the previous stanza with the golden rein that dominates the mind. Logic hinders the mind as it races with creative and inspired thoughts.

There are sections in this poem that mirror each other, as previously mentioned. The fifth stanza in each section directly relate to each other. In the fifth stanza of the first section, the speaker says, “ideas sin palabras / palabras sin sentido, / cadencias que no tienen / ni ritmo ni compás” (“Rima III”, lines 17-20). This stanza reinforces the concept that the process of inspiration is formless and without a logical sequence. It is important to look this stanza in comparison to the fifth stanza in the second section that says: “Armonioso ritmo / que con cadencia y número / las fugitivas notas / encierra en el compás” (“Rima III”, lines 50-53). The two stanzas both discuss cadences, but the nature of the cadences is where there are distinct differences. The first “cadencia” that is described does not have a set rhythm to guide the cadences of thought. There is not any logic to the cadences; therefore, there is a mysterious aspect to the cadences due to unpredictability. The second “cadencia” is described markedly different than the first because logic has dictated that it has a direction and a clear purpose. The rhyme is described as having cadences and it is numbered. Rather than the cadences from the

first section that lacked specified purpose, the second cadence is actually used as a descriptive tool that provides clear insight to the rhyme.

The second similar aspect between the two sections is the use of the word “compás”. In the Spanish translation of the word “cómpas”, there are several different meanings. Within the frame of the poem, the meaning of “cómpas” most likely means rhythm. There is an alternative meaning of cómpas, however, that means compass. Regardless of the actual definition of the word, the overall sense of “cómpas” is having a set direction or pattern to follow. In the first section, the cadences are described as not having a compass to guide them. The second section is different because the notes of the rhyme are encapsulated by the compass. The choice to repeat the words “cadencia” and “compás” is notable because of the connotations they hold. Cadences are the variations of sound and meter of a phrase, which often create unique qualities in the sounds. The cadences of the first and second sections are different because the first mention of the cadence did not have any particular rhythm or compass, while the second mention of cadence is used as a tool of logic and measurement. The differences between the mentions of “compás” is also interesting because the first usage of the word is describing the absence of a pattern in the cadences, but the second usage of “cómpas” involves the “cómpas” encircling the “fugitive notes”. The difference between the two uses of the word is important because there is a shift between the absence and presence of the “cómpas”. The first mention is in the section outlining the process of frenzied inspiration and the usage of the word “cómpas” is saying that the strict pattern does not exist. It makes sense that the strict rhythm does not exist in this section because it might constrict the creative process. The second “cómpas” is in the section describing logic. The “cómpas” exists to help encompass and dominate the unknown and the irrational. The usage,

and lack thereof, of “cómpas” helps to further distinguish between the two sections and modes of thinking in the poem.

If the first section is representative of the Romantic period and the second section represents the Enlightenment, then the last stanza in the poem is a blanketing statement by Bécquer made in an attempt to create balance. The stanza says. “Con ambas siempre en lucha / y de ambas vencedor, / tan sólo al genio es dado / a un yugo atar las dos” (“Rima III”, lines 67-70). While many of Bécquer’s works thoroughly explore the strongest concepts of Romanticism, this poem can attest to the need to find a balance between the two sides. The statement that only a genius has the ability to harness logic and inspiration is a powerful statement. In the hyper-intellectual progress of the Enlightenment period, many of the best qualities of inspiration were lost because they cannot be explained or harnessed by mankind. According to Bécquer, inspiration is a mysterious quality that can come from some of the darkest places in the mind, making it impossible to rationalize. Instead of trying to rationalize these unknown concepts, Bécquer suggests that a balance should be created between the thirst for complete knowledge and unbridled inspiration.

Conclusion

Within the works explored in this thesis, Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer created works that indicate that there is a connection between the themes of darkness and obscurity in British and Spanish Romanticism and the quest for complete knowledge in the Enlightenment period. The dramatically dark, inexplicable themes in Romanticism were created in contrast to the blinding, extremely intellectual themes of the Enlightenment. The writers of the Romantic movement found inspiration in the illogical and irrational aspects of the human experience. By using these themes, the authors were able to collectively shun the Enlightenment and give credence to Romanticism. Through the usage of darkness and strangeness, Lord Byron describes a post-Enlightenment society that has consumed the world in the quest for light. He uses the metaphor of an apocalypse to condemn the constant search for enlightenment in a way that evokes terror and beauty. On the other hand, Byron created a beautiful poem that gave darkness a feminine form that is beauty incarnated. Lord Byron's works reflected his reverence towards darkness and the unknown. He gave darkness both power and beauty, which solidified the idea that darkness does not exclusively equate horror and death. Byron seems to suggest that if mankind attempts to purge the unknown from society, the world will suffer.

In Spain, Bécquer describes the process of inspiration using symbols of irrationality and fits of mania. Bécquer had an interesting quality to his work in that he acknowledged his thirst for knowledge like any other man, but he chose to cherish the harder to define aspects of the world as well. Bécquer found a balance between his desires as a man to be omnipotent and the goal to preserve the strange, inexplicable characteristics of human experience. Through the

works of Lord Byron and Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, who were in different countries and born in different times, there was a restoration of the beauty of darkness and the unexplainable.

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