

# On the Features of the Active Romantic Literature

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Received: December 9, 2010      Accepted: April 1, 2011      doi:10.5539/ass.v7n6p224

## Abstract

This text tries to talk in a great detail about the features of the active Romantic literature in the aspects of the concept, types, characteristics, etc.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, Active Romanticism, Literature, Feature

It can be known that, from the source of Romanticism, Romantic literature refers to that a romanticist writer, based on the real life, rich fantasy and passion and a strong subjective emotions, expresses his or her extreme dissatisfactions with the reality to reflect his aesthetic principle of the strong pursuit for the ideals or dreams and a writing principle by adopting bold imagination, exaggerating and distorted techniques to create an idealized image and show his eager pursuit for the ideal world by pouring his inner passions. All the artistic creation all over the world of all the times always bears the feature of this kind.

The active Romanticism refers to the literature expressing the ideals and feelings in line with the trend of social and historical development. It has the aggressive characteristics, representing the ideal full of vision for the future and the criticism of all the evil realities. It fights against the unreasonable reality, pursues good ideal consistent with social progress, creates and gives a high praise for the rebellious spirit and aggressive figures or images, and guides people to resist the irrational reality. Therefore, such writings always have great boldness of vision, boundless passion, high-spirited mood, and powerful strength to inspire and motivate people to move forward. Byron, the British Romantic writer, expressed his rebellious feelings with his blazing songs or poems and showed his extremely disgust and disappointment to the upper-class society. Another case in point is Li Bai and his poems in the Tang Dynasty. Great ambition and self-confidence can be seen in “a time will come to ride the wind and cleave the waves to cross the sea”, the proud independent personality in the famous line of “how can I gravely bow and scrape to men of high rank and men of high office who never will suffer being shown an honest-hearted face!” and the manner of forthright in “the things that Heaven made must have a use; though I squander a thousand gold pieces, time may restore them.”. All have laid a solid foundation for that Li Bai together with Qu Yuan, is a great active Romantic poet in Chinese literary history.

Active Romantic literature is a literary trend in the context of specific historical period and the authors, although they have different political views and writing styles, they still have some creative common characteristics.

As for the active Romantic writer, generally speaking, they have strong dissatisfactions with the reality. When they are confronted with the harsh reality, to varying degrees, they adopted an evasive attitude. Furthermore, their temperament and personality made them reluctant to give delicate descriptions of reality. Instead, they were willing to depict life as it was. Rather than concentrating the narration of everyday life or the real details, they preferred flying their imagination to picture odd people and environments. Sometimes they broke the boundaries of God and man, of time and space, and of life and death to show an artistic realm of the other world. They had persistent pursuit of their ideals and tried to use their world of imagination to deny and criticize the real world. For example, Wu Cheng'en, in his romantic mythical novel, *Pilgrimage to the West*, created a magical and colorful world through the rich and daring artistic imagination and fascinating plots, to reveal and disclose the darkness and corruption of the real world. Monkey King is the most glorious image of the book. The story of Making Chaos in the Heavenly Palace highlights his love of freedom and his spirit of courage. Taking Buddhist Scriptures shows his spirit of eliminating all the evils in the world. He is the hero who can discard crucifixion from the secular world. Du Liniang, a figure in *the Peony Pavilion*, pursues pure and free love. Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables* written by Hugo moves all the readers with his personalities and moral behaviors. All these images can not be found in the real life. They are the ideal figures or heroes embodying the hope of the writers.

In general, active Romanticists focus on the expression of the subjective feelings. Emotions of the writers, like the rapids or volcanic eruptions, cannot be stopped. Guo Moruo once said, "I am subjective... I think my imagination is really stronger than my ability of observation." "I'm also impulsive too... when I get excited, I am like a rushing horse. And when my impulse is stifled, I will become a dead puffer." His *Furnace Coal*, written in May 4 Period shows his strong feelings for his motherland, as bears a strong active romanticism. Dominated by the ideal spirit, the active romantic literature employs more myths, legends, strange stories far from the real life to create the artistic world of imagination and fiction in a fanciful way.

Active romanticists believe in nature and they are indulged in the feelings, spirit and will of their own. They emphasize taking nature as an object and exploring the natural essence of human nature. They show great disgust for the urban and industrial culture in the capitalist society, their antipathy for the evil reality, so the majestic and magnificent nature and distant exotic scenes are where the romantic writers put their freedom and dreams. With their pens, the beauty and sublime of nature and the ugliness and vulgarity of the urban life are in sharp contrast. Some remarkable figures often appear in nature or odd or exotic surroundings. The romantic writers emphasized the close relationship between man and nature. For example, they observed nature and the dynamic biological beauty and regarded them as the expression of the cosmic spirit.

With the deep love for nature, they viewed nature as the truth. Therefore, the yearning for nature and the song for spontaneous human nature become the themes and subjects of active Romantic literature, which opens up a new field for the European literature. By the Romantic Movement in the 19th century, for the first time, Byron, Shelley, Wordsworth and Goethe, had put the sea, rivers, mountains into their own works. For instance, in Byron's poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, there are many wonderful descriptions of the natural landscape that the hero has heard, such as water waves on the Lemon Lake, the glaciers and waterfalls on Alpine, and the ancient Greek scenes, etc. Nature is employed to show the human spirit of autonomy and struggle in order to create the ideal heroes.

Active Romantic writers all pay special attention to the folk literature of the Middle Ages. In Germany and the United Kingdom, romantic activities began with the collection of the medieval folk literature. This is because that the medieval folk literature did not controlled by the rules and prohibition of the classicism. It featured in the rich imagination, deep and sincere emotions, free expressions and popular language. The writers were keen on the past, especially the Middle Ages. They were appealed by the original things, pure and close to nature. If it can be said that the basic characteristics of Romantic literature is to express the ideals and aspirations in the passionate exaggerated way, It also can be said that such a form of literature had already come into being before the very beginning of the literal activities of the world. For example, each nation has the ancient myth. The *Songs of Chu*, of pre-Qin Dynasty literature is a good example in point. Expressing ideals and fantasy is one of the important reasons for literature to appear. In this sense, the Romantic spirit is an important source of literature. And literature from its very beginning has an extremely close relationship with Romanticism. Many Romanticists pay much attention to collect and arrange folk songs, children's tales and other folk literal works, as, to many degrees, has kept and promoted the folk tradition of Chinese and Western literal traditions. Romanticism can be said to begin with the collection of folk literature.

Active Romanticism is dominated by subjective feelings when expressing the life. What is depicted is caused by emotions. Therefore, the artistic images shaped are quite different from people in real life. For example, the scenery description in *Tianmu Mountain Ascended in a Dream*, written by Li Bai, is what is imagined in passion. "My heart and my dreams are in Wu and Yue, and they cross Mirror Lake all night in the moon." "Sunny ocean can be seen on half way, holy cock is crowing in space". Hope and enthusiasm are always expressed in Romantic literature. Active or revolutionary Romantic literature especially pays attention to the creation of ideal heroes and always forms strong contrast to strengthen and highlight the tendency of subjective feelings. *Danke* in one of the novels written by Gorky is a good example in case. He is brave enough to lead the crowd to walk out of forest threatening their life. When the torch went out and they fell into the darkness, he took out his heart to illuminate the road ahead for people to get out of the dead land. *Danke* obviously is an idealized artistic image and the author's aesthetic ideal. In order to create an idealized image of the art, the Romantic writers often select materials from myths, legends, folk tales, etc. and imagine creating wonderful places and fantastic events to serve their idealized figures. Through different artistic images, active Romantic literature employs a literal spirit of transcending the reality to show the future or fantasy and a scene of an ideal life of human beings. German writer Friedrich Schiller once said that active Romanticism attempted to substitute beautiful dream for the insufficient truth. Therefore, active Romanticism is not like realism which stresses the real description of the real objects in life. Instead, it strives to express the desires, subjective anticipations, and the passions from the desires. In the literal creation, the active Romanticism follows the principle of idealization. As long as desired or anticipated life can be showed, the literary images even if in violation of the inherent logic of life itself, do not

matter much. Active Romantic writers often change the original formation of life, boldly and artificially create the fictional or distorted images, figures or environment driven by emotions and desires. They imagine and create the artistic world according to the idealized life style and the writers' subjective emotional logic. It can be said that the artistic world created by the active Romanticism is imaginary, surreal and subjective. By shaping the ideal world out of the real life, they can express their subjective feelings to their hearts' desire.

Generally speaking, active Romantic works is always of the features of magnificent grandeur, strong feelings, bizarre plots, peculiar imagination, beautiful language, and various forms. The legendary stories and gorgeous words are employed to mix the historical legends, myth stories, natural wonders and exotic scenes together to show the ideal world and life, displaying a great romantic color. Active romanticism, in order to meet the subjective needs, usually uses forceful words to strive to release the unrestrained emotions. For instance, *Ode to the West Wind*, by Shelley, the British active Romantic poet, has emotional words. "Fallen leaves" is named as "yellow leaves", "the black", "the white", "the miserably read", or "the countless sick or disabled". Winter is called "the dark winter bed". Colors are used in other phrases, e.g. "green Mediterranean Sea water", "crystal bright summer wave" and so on. Exaggeration in the poems by Li Bai in such lines as "the Yellow River water from the sky rushes to the sea and never returns", "the pouring waterfalls diving towards a dizzy bottom seems to be Milky Way falling from the heavenly kingdom", "white hair drifts three-thousand "Zhang" (3.3 meters per Zhang), because my anxiety lingers so long", "the road to Shu makes more harder than to go to the sky", and so on, demonstrates the grand and powerful momentum.

Active Romantic literature, based on subjective logic of emotions and the needs to show the ideal, often gives full play to the imagination, exaggeration, fabrication, distortion, metaphor, symbol and other artistic techniques and devotes to the creation of the ideal art world, as reflects its features in art forms and techniques of expression. It pursues bizarre plots, extraordinary figures and circumstances, adopts techniques of exaggeration and comparison, and forms strong contrast of beauty and ugliness so as to achieve surprising artistic effect. For instance, Hugo in his famous novel of *Notre Dame de Paris* created tremendous contrast between beauty and ugliness, and the inside and outside of the heart to show his love and hate. Li Bai in his poems of "Bring in the Wine" and "Severe Traveling", used "drink up three hundred cups at a stretch," to indicate bingeing drinking, "ten thousand coins for a Dou of wine" to show the price is high, "black hair in the morning but white as snow in the evening" to suggest that life time is short, "will cross the Yellow River" and "will climb Taihang Mountain" to symbolize his great ambition, "the icy rivers" and "snow mountains" to symbolize the treacherous official career. All these display his unconstraint personality. Dominated by the spirit of idealism, the Romantic literature uses more myths and legends, and strange stories far from the real life as the expression objects to create fictional and imaginable artistic world in a fanciful way. George Sang, the French Romantic writer once said, "Romantic art pursues the ideal not in the real world, but the in the imagining realm." So Romantic writers often depict a fantasy life. In a fictitious environment, they describe some images with strange characters, behaviors and abilities that a superman seemed to have. This is just what the active Romanticism really is.

In short, active Romanticism opposes the unreasonable social system, deeply explores the feelings of the human world, and creates images of distinctive features through magnificent imagination and exaggeration. It stresses the absolute creative freedom. It is fond of describing the history previous to the Middle Ages. For example, Scott, Victor Hugo, Alexander Dumas and other Romantic writers take historical material as writing objects. It emphasizes the description of natural scenery, and advocates Rousseau's "returning to nature". It stresses that personal feelings should be freely expressed, thus it is strong subjective. Active romantic literature is used to employing contrast and exaggeration, paying much attention to the aesthetic value of ugliness, and vigorously recommending imagination. Imagination is emphasized to show ideal and hope and nature is stressed to express individual's subjective feelings or emotions. Symbolism and mythology are highlighted to display the literal metaphor and expressiveness and the artistic expressions of exaggeration and peculiarity. All these are the features of the active Romantic literature.

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