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**Book Review**

**Romanticism: 100 Poems (2021) by Michael Ferber**

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**Publisher; Cambridge University Press, Cornwall (2021), x+172 pp.**

**Language: English**

**ISBN (print edition): 978-1-108-49105-1**

In his introduction to the anthology, Ferber defines Romanticism in a dense and cluttered fashion which is *ziemlich* uncommon in critical volumes on the subject. Two ideas from that definition stand out with distinction: first, the prevalence of imagination over reason, which could be interpreted as an exploration of the moral superstructure in spite of reason vis-à-vis intuition and aesthetic properties, and secondly, “detranscendentalized” religion” (2), initiated through replacing theological profundity with natural and extra-natural reality – a form that has been dramatized to poetic perfection in the conversation between Mary Bruin and Father Hart in Yeats’s *The Land of Heart’s Desire*.<sup>i</sup>In other words, Ferber’s Romanticism is a transposition of God from the rationale of cosmos to the intuition of it – a methodological shift involving cosmic chaos over the autocracy of logic. Given that the volume is devoted to the inclusion as well as assessment of *Romanticisms* (I use the word in compliance with A.O. Lovejoy’s essay on the subject), it is useful if I list them accordingly, prioritizing the lesser known Continental authors over the canonical Anglosphere. It could be summarized as follows:

**German Romanticism:**

Perhaps the most prominent form of Continental Romanticism to have existed in Europe, Ferber honors it by including Von Goethe’s ‘Wandlers Nachtlid II’, providing the readers with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poetic translation of it, followed by Erlkönig, translated by Walter Scott. The former, prominent in its representation of *ruhig* during nightfall, appeals through an inherent serenity in beauty – a quality much admired by G.E. Lessing in his *Laöcoon*.<sup>ii</sup>It would behoove us to notice that while the first poem is a well-known lyric, it has an underlying angst within its psyche of darkness, barely veiled by the superficial calm. This is followed by Goethe’s *Sturm-und-Drang* compatriot, Friedrich Schiller, anthologized through translations of ‘Der Handschuh’ and ‘Nänie’ which begins with “Even the Beautiful dies”, at once an approbation and disapprobation of Goethe’s artistry, a sublime characteristic in the author, eulogized by Heinrich Heine in *The Romantic School*.<sup>iii</sup>Friedrich Holderlin’s ‘Hälfte des Lebens’ and Sophie Mereau’s ‘An einen Baum am Spälier’, both poems on the transitoriness of human life, are succeeded by Friedrich Schlegel who, along with his brother August Wilhelm, is often recognized as the first theorist of Romanticism.<sup>iv</sup> He is represented through a translation of ‘Die Gebushe’. Clemens Brentano’s ‘Abendständchen’, Karoline Von Günderode’s ‘Der Luftschiffer’ (which reads like a introspective and feminine version of Goethe’s lyric), Joseph Freiherr Von Eichendorff’s ‘Abschied’, ‘Todeslust’ and ‘Auf meines Kindes Tod’ are anthologized next, followed Annette Von Droste-Hülshoff whose ‘Im Moose’ deserves to rise from academic obscurity, and can be read as a pre-cursor to the death poems of the twentieth century, especially those by Larkin and Eliot. Heinrich Heine has been anthologized last through two poems, of which the second one (‘Wandl’ ich in dem Wald des

Abends') is a pure lyric.

### **Italian Romanticism:**

Two sonnets of Ugo Foscolo – the first on the death of his brother Giovanni, and the second on the Aonian Muse are followed by Giacomo Leopardi's famous poem, 'L'Infinito', in many ways a refrain on the stifling determinism of life, in line with his attraction towards Stoical philosophy.<sup>v</sup>

### **American Romanticism:**

William Cullen Bryant's "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood" marks some freshness of *auswahl* besides the usually anthologized 'Thanatopsis' and 'Prairies'. It is accompanied by Ralph Waldo Emerson's 'Waldeinsamkeit' (Forest Tranquility) where the spiritual in nature is "on the mountain-crest sublime", justifying Ferber's definition at the beginning. Longfellow's 'Snow-Flakes', Edgar Allan Poe's Sonnet 'To Science' and Walt Whitman's 'The Base of All Metaphysics' finds due space alongside Emily Dickinson's poetry. Whitman's poem argues the underlying natural and spiritual affinity between social beings, but fails to acknowledge that Kant was directly responsible for igniting Romanticism by dissociating theology from both intellectual and emotional existence. In other words, that either intellect or emotion could be discussed without reference to theological advancements entirely was a reality that Kant embodied in his *Critiques*.<sup>vi</sup> Henry David Thoreau is curiously absent from the volume, although I believe his mediocre poetry would still uphold the emergent spirit of the Age.

### **Scottish-Welsh Romanticism:**

Robert Burns's 'Ae Fond Kiss' and 'Afton Water', both Romantic homilies, are followed by Helen Maria Williams's 'Sonnet to Twilight', a poem in the spirit of William Lisle Bowles, an English poet who has not been anthologized in the volume. Sir Walter Scott's 'Jock of Hazeldean' has been preferred over stupendously Romantic poems such as 'Coronach' by the author. Lord Byron has been represented generously through selections from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, but it is safe to proclaim that 'I saw thee Weep' could have been substituted by the Classical fervor in 'When We Two Parted'.

*Irish, Polish and Spanish Romanticism:* Thomas Moore's 'Oh! Blame Not the Bard' from *Irish Melodies* and William Butler Yeats's 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' (amongst the Irish poets) find worthwhile mention, but the inclusion of 'Coole Park and Ballylee, 1931' would have amplified and preserved the crisis of Yeats's intellectual faith in late Romanticism. The Polish national Poet, Adam Mickiewicz and the Spanish poet Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer have been allotted one poem each, with Mickiewicz's 'The Akkerman Steppes' allowing soulful reading.

### **Russian Romanticism:**

A small cluster of Russian poets have found their place in Ferber's anthology; Anton Delvig's 'Inspiration', Pushkin's version of Wordsworth's 'Scorn Not the Sonnet', Alexander Odoevsky's Shelleyan 'Response to A.S. Pushkin' and Mikhail Lermontov's sepulchral 'The Poet's Death' deserve mention.

### **French Romanticism:**

André Chénier's 'La jeune captive', written in the aftermath of the French Revolution, opens the innings, followed by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore whose 'Les roses de Saâdi' and 'Une lettre de femme' records the desertion of a lover upon pregnancy. Alphonse De Lamartine's 'Le Lac', written in imitation of classical pastoral poetry, offers an embalming read. Alfred De Vigny's 'La mort du loup' must certainly be brought into the academic domain for literary criticism, as it stands at par with Coleridge's 'Rime' symbolically. Generous selections from Victor Hugo's poetry are accompanied by Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve's crucial translation

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of Wordsworth's 'Scorn not the Sonnet', an acute addition for which Ferber must be credited in his recognition of imitations of the original as suitable for both reading and criticism. Gérard De Nerval, Alfred De Musset, Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudlaire are the final four French poets in the volume.

### English Romanticism:

Apart from including regularly anthologized pieces from the High-Romantics (Including Blake), I shall list a number of poems that have been written by lesser-known poets and anthologized by the editor. Charlotte Smith, best known for her blank verse poem, *The Emigrants*, has been represented by 'To a Nightingale' and 'On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because it was Frequented by a Lunatic', followed by Leigh Hunt's sonnet 'To Percy Shelley', which could have been substituted by extracts from 'The Story of Rimini' (1816). Susan Evance's 'Sonnet: To Melancholy', John Clare's 'I've Loved Thee Swordy Well' (which is capacious in terms of pedagogical value) and 'The Skylark' (which could be construed as Shelley's non-Phoenix version), Felicia Hemans's sublime 'The Rock of Cader Idris' (comparable with Shelley's 'Mont Blanc'), Letitia Elizabeth Landon's 'The Unknown Grave' (a feminine version of Gray's 'Graveyard' elegy), extracts from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Aurora Leigh' where she praises the poet's occupation: "To find man's veritable stature out,/Erect, sublime – the measure of a man," culminating in Emily Brontë's 'Alone I Sat.' Mary Robinson does not find her place in Ferber's volume.

Michael Ferber does what Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill, Jerome McGann, Duncan Wu and Pramod K. Nayar had not attempted before him – charting the literature of European as well as trans-Atlantic Romanticism through representative poems. While the objective of the anthology is noble, there are interstices, as I have demonstrated throughout. The author, in a fascicle to this volume, should include a few more poets (and poems) who have been neglected or overshadowed by longish poems of established Poets. Besides that, Indian Romanticism should be allowed modest representation through selections from the poetry of Toru Dutt (1856-1877) and Henry Louis Vivian Derozio. (1809-1831) The anthology shall then be able to globalize its respectable position even further.

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Father Hart: You cannot know the meaning of your words.

Mary: Father, I am right weary of four tongues:  
A tongue that is too crafty and too wise,  
A tongue that is too godly and too grave,  
A tongue that is more bitter than the tide,  
And a Kind tongue too full of drowsy love,  
Of drowsy love and my captivity.

This is, in Yeats's romantic way, a counter-argument meant to confront the "rationale" of the Enlightenment. See *The Land of Heart's Desire*, edited by E. Haldeman-Julius and published as an e-book for *Project Gutenberg*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/15153/15153-h/15153-h.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> "Beauty was the supreme law of the arts...it necessarily follows, that every other object in art must be sacrificed at once when incompatible with beauty, and in any case must be rendered subordinate to it" (19). See *Laöcoon: The Limits of Poetry and Painting*, translated from the German of Lessing by William Ross for J. Ridgway and Sons, 1836.

<sup>iii</sup> "[Schiller] was an honest, straight-forward man...The correspondence between Schiller and Goethe...throws considerable light on the relations between these two poets and the Schlegels. Goethe, haughtily and contemptuously mocks at them; Schiller is angry at their impertinent scandal-mongering, and at their passion for notoriety, and he calls them "puppies" (41). See *The Prose Writings of Heinrich Heine*, edited with an introduction by Havelock Ellis for *Project Gutenberg*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/37478/37478-h/37478-h.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> “Our poetry, said the Schlegels, is superannuated; our muse is an old and wrinkled hag; our cupid is no fair youth, but a shrunken, grey-haired dwarf. Our emotions are withered; our imagination dried up; we must reinvigorate ourselves. We must seek again the choked-up springs of the naïve =, simple poetry of the middle ages, where bubbles the elixir of youth” (*TRS*, 36)

<sup>v</sup> “The Stoics adhered to their conception of fate, which, as has been seen, involves the notion of determinism, and at the same time sought to remain faithful to the traditional and philosophical intuitions that a man is responsible for some of his actions, by assuming that responsible decision-making is itself an element I the deterministic system of fate” (21). See “The Stoic Conception of Fate” by Josiah B. Gould, published in *The Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1974, pp. 17-32. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2708740>.

<sup>vi</sup> To quote Heine again, “This book [*Critique of Pure Reason*] is the sword with which, in Germany, theism was decapitated” (‘Religion and Philosophy in Germany’, p. 64)

### Bio-note

Shouvik N. Hore has published two books of poetry- *The Horizon of Thoughts* and *Poet's Choice* (Vol. 2). He has published poetry in National and International journals. His research papers and treatises have appeared in Appropriations (JDE, Bankura Christian College), JCLA, Journal of the Department of English, Vidyasagar University and JDE, Gauhati University (To mention a few), and he has won a National Poetry competition organized by the Poona College of Arts, Science and Commerce. He has been awarded an MPhil from the University of Hyderabad, Telangana, and is currently pursuing PhD (Junior Research Fellow) from Vidyasagar University, West Bengal. He has also guest-edited an issue on the Sublime for the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*.

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