

Romantic Period

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Romanticism, generally speaking, is the expression of sharpened sensibilities and heightened imaginative feelings. Emotion and Imagination are the bedrock of Romanticism. Without flights of imaginative sensibility we may have anything else except romanticism. Further the Romanticist takes us to far off places in the Middle Ages and introduces the readers to a world of strangeness and beauty. It is the combination of strangeness allied with beauty that we have the essence of the Romantic spirit.

The supreme Romantic movement in English letters was the Renaissance. It had brought about a transformation not only in English but also European life. It was followed by a reaction in which Classicism with its insistence on reason and logic, order and sanity, and tranquillity held the supreme sway. Then came the Romantic Revival in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, completely throwing overboard the values that were held dear by the neo-classicists headed by Alexander Pope. A new leaven was given to art and literature, and the poetry of early nineteenth century witnessed a complete break away from the traditions and usages upheld by the neo-classicists of the preceding age.

### ← Characteristics of the Romantic Poetry

#### 1. Break from set rules :-

The poetry of the Romantic Revival is in direct contrast to the characteristics cultivated by eighteenth century neo-classical poets. In the eighteenth century poetry was governed by set rules and regulations. There were well defined lines of poetic composition, and any deviation from the beaten track was frowned by mentors of poetic thought. The first thing that we have in the poetry of the new age is the break from the thralldom of rules and regulations. "The romantic movement was marked and is always marked," says W. J. Long, "by a

strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom, which in science and theology, as well as in literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit.

### Poetry of Country-Life :-

Poetry in the eighteenth century was concerned with clubs and coffee houses, drawing rooms and the social and political life of London. It was essentially the poetry of town life. First-hand observation of nature and practically no place in classical poetry. In the poetry of Romantic Revival the interests of poets was transferred from town to country life and from the artificial decorations of drawing rooms to the natural beauty and loveliness of nature. Nature began to have its own importance in the poetry of this age, and Wordsworth was the great poet who revealed the physical and spiritual beauty of nature to those who could not see any charm in the wild flowers, the green fields and the chirping birds. Thus in the poetry of the Romantic Revival, we have an added zest among the poets to discard the glammers of an artificial life and turn to the elemental simplicities of a life lived in closer touch with the beauties and charm of nature.

### Interest in the common life —

Romantic poets started taking interest in the lives of the common people, the shepherds and the cottagers and left the gallant lords and gay butterflies of fashion to the care of novelists. A renewed interest in simple life marked the poetry of the age. A feeling of humanitarianism coloured the poetry of Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron. Thus Romantic poetry was marked by intense human sympathy and consequent understanding of the human heart.

### Love of Liberty and freedom :->

In Romantic poetry emphasis was laid on liberty and freedom of the individual. Some of the Romantic poets were rebels against tyranny and brutality exercised by

tyrants and despots over human beings crushed by poverty and smashed by inhuman laws. In the poetry of this age we have a note of rebellion and a crusade against effete social conventions and worn out traditions. Freedom is the breath in which the Romantic poets breathed freely.

### Escape to the Middle Ages —

Some Romantic poets felt chafed with the tyranny, squalor and ugliness of materialistic life of their age, and to avoid this life of uneasy restlessness, they sought through their poetry an escape from the carking cares and corroding anxieties of the world to a world of beauty and joy which their poetic imagination had pictured. In many ways Romantic poetry proved to be the poetry of escape from the sorrows and sufferings of mundane life of their times to the Middle Age, where they found enough beauty and joy to feed the waning flame of their souls.

### Predominance of imagination and emotion —

In romantic poetry reason and intellect were subdued and their place was taken by imagination, emotion and passion. In the poetry of all the Romantic poets of this age we have the exhibition of heightened emotional sensibilities and imaginative flights of genius bordering on empyrean heights unscathed by the poets of the previous age.

### Supernaturalism →

Supernaturalism is another outstanding quality of romantic poetry. A sense of wonder and mystery was imparted to poetry by poets like Coleridge, Scott and Keats. It was this supernatural note that gave to romantic poetry its atmosphere of wonder and mystery,

Uncanniness and eerie feeling, and justify the title 'The Renaissance of Wonder' given to this poetic age by Theodore Watts-Dunton.

• Endless Variety in Poetry :-

In romantic poetry we come across endless variety. Poetry of this age is as varied as the character and moods of different writers. "When we read Pope, for instance, we have general impression of sameness" says Long, "but in the work of the best romanticists there is endless variety. To read them is like passing through a new village, meeting a score of different human types, and finding in each one something to love or to remember."

Summing up the salient characteristics of the poetry of the Romantic Revival W. J. Long says, "The poetry of Romantic Revival was characterized by the protest against the bondage of rules, the return to nature and the human heart, the interest in old sagas and medieval romances as suggestive of a heroic age the sympathy with the toilers of the world, the emphasis upon individual genius, and the return to Milton and the Elizabethans, instead of to Pope and Dryden for literary models

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