

TDC Part I, Paper I (Major Trends in Different Periods)

ROMANTIC REVIVAL

The romantic period is a term applied to the literature of approximately from 1785 to 1832. During this time, literature began to show the tendencies that were not entirely new but were in strong contrast to the standard literary practice of the eighteenth century. This period was termed as Romantic Revival because it tried to recreate the Elizabethan romantic aura as against the Neo-Classical framework of the early 18th century.

The reaction to the standard literary practice and critical norms of the eighteenth century occurred in many areas and in varying degrees. Reason no longer held the high place it had held in the eighteenth century; its place was taken by imagination, emotion, and individual sensibility. Writers tended to regard themselves as the most interesting subject for literary creation; interest in urban life was replaced by an interest in nature, particularly in untamed nature and in solitude. The romantic writers turned back to their own native traditions. The romantic writers responded strongly to the impact of new forces, particularly the French Revolution and its promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The humanitarianism that had been developing during the eighteenth century was taken up enthusiastically by the romantic writers. The combination of new interests, new attitudes, and fresh forms produced a body of literature that was strikingly different from the literature of the eighteenth century. The poets and the writers not only sought to free themselves from the fetters of neo-classical rules but also experimented with the old forms, revived some of them.

Wordsworth, the great champion of the spiritual and moral values of physical nature, tried to show the natural dignity, goodness, and the worth of the common man. His Preface to Lyrical Ballads published in 1798 is considered as the Bible of English Romantic Poetry; in the Preface he tried to conceptualize his new kind of poetry.

The romantic revival took place with Victor Hugo's concept "liberalism in literature". The Romantic Movement is marked by the following tendencies:

1. Strong reaction against reason, rule and customs. The new poets felt themselves confined in neoclassical frameworks. So they tried to give free reign to their theme and technique. For this they had to rebel against several hard and fast tenets of 18th century neoclassical poetry.
2. Call back to nature. "Return to nature" was their motto. They turned away from the artificial urban life and found refuge in the country life and nature. They worshipped nature. Love of nature for them meant love of mankind, humanism and a more world view that encompassed the idea of freedom and

equality.

3. The poet put more emphasis on imagination rather than intellect. They allowed free play of imagination in their poetry. Their free flights of fancy often led them to the strange, unfamiliar and the distant. Their emphasis on imagination and emotions made their poetry primarily subjective. This was in contrast with the classical preference for objectivity in poetry. For them poetry was not genuine if it was not personal.
4. Intense human sympathy – understanding of human heart. Poetry became closer to everyday life of common man. The ‘poetic diction’ of the eighteenth century was rejected as artificial and unnatural.
5. The interest in the old sagas and medieval romances. The attraction for the remote, the exotic and the mysterious enkindled in the romantic poets a love for the medieval. Just as the writers of the eighteenth century turned to classical writers for inspiration, the poets of the romantic revival turned to medieval age for inspiration. They gave free reign to their emotion and passion. They abhorred classical restraint and obsession with reason.

The romantic period includes the work of two generations of writers. The first generation was born during the thirty and twenty years preceding 1800; the second generation was born in the last decade of the 1800s. The chief writers of the first generation were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Blake, Lamb, and Hazlitt. Keats and Shelley belong to the second generation, along with Byron, who was older than they were by a few years. Among these the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge proved to be paving stone for the emergence of mainstream Romantic poetry. Wordsworth’s Lyrical Ballads (1798) began with Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” continued with poems displaying delight in the powers of nature and the humane instincts of ordinary people, and concluded with the meditative “Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth’s attempt to set out his mature faith in nature and humanity.

His investigation of the relationship between nature and the human mind continued in the long autobiographical poem addressed to Coleridge and later titled “The Prelude” (1798–99). The Prelude constitutes the most significant English expression of the Romantic discovery of the self as a topic for art and literature. The poem also makes much of the work of memory, a theme explored as well in the “Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.”

The work of both poets was directed back to national affairs during these years by the rise of Napoleon. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge benefited from the advent in 1811 of the Regency, which brought a renewed interest in the arts. The works of these two poets became reference points for all the upcoming literary artists of first and second generation of the romantic literature.