



## ROMANTIC AGE :- AN INTRODUCTION

**DR. MANOJ KUMAR CHATURVEDI**

Assist. Prof. English,

Janta Mahavidyalay, Ajeetmal, Auriya

(UP) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*The Romantic period in English Literature has a very wide sense in itself. As it has taken its birth from French revolution which took place in 1789. But the exact date of the beginning of Romantic period with the publication of "Lyrical Ballad" in 1789 by words worth with the collaboration of Coleridge. There were many changes seen in the poetry of Romantic period. The poets of like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron challenged the theory of poetry propounded by the poets of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth made a cry to his fellow poets "Return to Nature". The Romantic period is special and unique in the Horizon of English literature. Actually romanticism became a controversial word with three phenomena associated with a change occurring in utopian sensibility towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and extending into the present. Basically it started in Germany and England during the 1790's as a new mode of imagination and vision and spread with considerable modification throughout Europe between 1800 and 1830.*

**Keywords:** *Meaning of The word 'Romance', beginning of The Romantic Period, Characteristics, major poets of the period, type of poetry, etc.*

### INTRODUCTION

The word 'romance' which was originally used to signify a long tale in prose or verse, changed its meaning, in the course of time and came to stand for the modern as opposed to the antique or classical writings. "It was the German critic Friedrich Schlegel, who had first used the term Romantic to designate a school of literature as opposed to the classic. From Germany, this meaning was carried to England and France."<sup>1</sup> Actually romanticism became a controversial word with three phenomena associated with a change occurring in utopian sensibility towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and extending into the present. It started in Germany and England during the 1790's as new mode of imagination and vision and spread

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with considerable modifications throughout Europe between 1800 and 1830.<sup>2</sup> As opposed to classical rigidity. And decorum, romanticism offered the writer absolute creative freedom. Imagination was placed above reason. In England the great romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge wrote lengthy discourses on imagination and fancy.

*“To neo-classical dictates of objectivity, initiation, invention, clarity, separation of prose and poetry, the romanticism oppose demands for the free play of imagination and originality functional rather than decorative imagery, the use of prose rhythms in poetry and lyrical prose in novel, essay and criticism. They defend obscurity as a necessary by-product of myth, symbol and institution of what today would be called the subconscious.”<sup>3</sup>*

The eighteenth century, variously called the ‘Age of reason’, ‘Age of pope and Johnson’, ‘The period of Enlightenment’, moved away from nature towards reason and romanticism is in many ways a reaction against the prevailing rational mentality of the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The romantic poets repeatedly turn to nature and the innocence of childhood. Such a tendency is found in Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron and Shelley. This tendency finds expression in the Lyrical Ballads published in 1797 by Wordsworth and Coleridge. Encouraged by the latter, Wordsworth wrote a preface to the second edition of the lyrical ballads, which can be considered the manifesto of the romantics. The two important contributions made by the preface are: that poets should go back to nature and that there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and the language of ordinary conversation. Though Coleridge inspired Wordsworth to write the preface to the Lyrical Ballads, in his own writings Coleridge disagrees with some of Wordsworth’s ideas regarding poetic diction, etc.

Coleridge’s contribution is the emphasis on imagination. Coleridge powerful use of imagination can be seen in his ‘Kubla Khan’. Such imaginative vision can be seen in Keats’ odes. Besides his thoughts on poetic diction and nature, Wordsworth laid it down almost as a rule that poetry is the result of the overflow of poetic emotions recollected in tranquility. Poems like ‘Tintern Abbey’ and ‘Daffodil’ are excellent examples of this process of poetic composition. In the next century T.S. Eliot was to attack this point (Not very wisely).

Coleridge was spokesman of the Romantic Movement in England. ‘His Biographia Literaria’ is the most important index of Coleridge’s philosophy, critical theories and intellectual development. From it the student is able to estimate the influence on Coleridge of German writers and philosophers and to observe the growth of the ideas that flowered in the Lyrical Ballads.<sup>5</sup> Besides this stupendous work, Coleridge also wrote a large collection of essays,



notes some of them fragmentary and unsystematic but all of them of a very illuminating nature. His lectures have also been collected and published.

Coleridge has been accused of having opened the doors of criticism to philosophy. It is true that he was strongly, influenced by the German transcendental thinkers. According to critical historians, though this helped to break the shackles of neo-classical critical regime, it showed the way to extra-literary and extra-critical disciplines to enter the field of pure literary criticism. During the latter half of the century other branches of philosophy like psychology and sociology as well as the sciences like psychology and physics entered the halls of criticism. In the twentieth century, in the name of inter-disciplinary criticism, every sphere of human activity and thought has been brought in, quite often to subserve completely non-literary fields. There have been protests.

*“Tate has consistently opposed the theorists who have been for decades connecting literature with sociology or using it as propaganda. These friends of literature have been trying to justify it by showing it to be something else”.*<sup>6</sup>

*The Victorian notion of the sugar-coated moral of social pill derives from philosophical rather than poetic sources.”*<sup>7</sup>

Among the Romantics, Wordsworth, though not a critic, made his own contribution of two important concepts. One was to turn attention of the critics from poetry to the poet, and the other was that poetry had its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility. T.S. Eliot can be ignored at this point in our study of romantic criticism. Coleridge’s contribution to critical thought was much greater.

*“The distinction between fancy and Imagination which he made is the result of his original response to Wordsworth’s poetry, wherein he saw ‘the union of deep feeling with profound thought...’*

‘Coleridge had set himself doggedly to work as Dr. Johnson did, he would be a great critic and theoretician.

Keats did not consider himself to be a critic and made no attempt to evolve a theory. But his critical intelligence which helped him to grow and reach maturity rapidly, is seen in the letters he wrote to his friends and relations. De Quincey, who spent his time encloded in opium smoke, could write brilliantly, when the mood of creation of criticism came upon him. His essays “On the knocking at the Gate in Macbeth’ is a fine example of ‘Affective fallacy’. Whatever modern critics might say of his approach and his methodology, there is no doubt



about the brilliant insight that De Quincey has into the dramatist's intention and the remarkably effective way in which he communicates the feeling of unreasonable terror to the reader.

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