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Topic: THE ROMANTIC POETRY

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It is widely held that the English Romantic Movement began with the publication of “The Lyrical Ballads” in 1798. But it will be a mistake to assign any definite date to it as it did not appear suddenly rather it was a result of long and gradual struggle, growth and development in the history of English literature. It is also true that the poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats etc. can not be said to be the first Romantics of the English literature. It is because the Elizabethan poets were undoubtedly romantic in spirit prior to them. They owned everything – sense of wonder and mystery, love for adventures and uniqueness, liking for curiosity and restlessness which we associate with the poets of the 19th century. Albert writes- “The romantic quest is for the remote and the distant, the Elizabethans were our first romantics.”

It is worth mention here that the romantic spirit of the Elizabethans suffered a total decline during the Augustan period . In this period literature became intellectual and rational . It further deteriorated to be termed as artificial, dry and monotonous during the Pseudo-classics .

It can , however, be said that a long step forward in the history of Romanticism was taken with the publication of the “Lyrical Ballads” in 1798 . Uptil now the movement had no unity, no fixed programme and no aim. It was not a conscious movement at all. It was now for the first time that two friends , Wordsworth and Coleridge emphasized the aims and objectives of the new poetry. Coleridge pointed out that he would treat the supernatural elements only to real and convincing while Wordsworth was to deal with subjects taken from ordinary and commonplace but so as to cast over them by the magical power of his imagination the charm of novelty. The former was to make the familiar look unfamiliar and the latter was to make the familiar look unfamiliar . In this way the principle , theory and methods of the new poetry was enunciated . Thus , both of them imparted a new consciousness and purpose to the movement and a new chapter of English Romanticism in history was opened .

Keats, Shelley and Byron are said to be romantic poets of second generation as they worked mainly after 1815 upto which

the flow of the best outputs of the poets of the first generation had gradually ceased .While the poets of the first generation attained respectability and recognition in their lifetime , the poets of the second generation remained unnoticed during their lifetime- their fame grew after their death.

The romantic poets were individualists and subjectivity is unavoidable for the highest type of Romanticism. The romantic poets valued their experiences to a degree which is difficult to parallel in earlier poets . Spenser , Milton and Pope make verse out of legend or knowledge which is common to humanity .The romantic poets undergo introspection seeking their own lives for strange sensations. With Wordsworth such sensations have a moral value and are often associated with simple and human objects . With Byron ,they evolve from the exotic pursuit of some mood or adventure which man has seldom known before . With Coleridge they lead to the dream –territory of Xanadu . In Romantic poetry there is a sense of wonder, of life seen with new sensibilities and fresh vision .this strangeness of the individual experience lead each of the romantics to a spiritual loneliness . they were keenly aware of their social obligations but the burden of an exceptional vision of life drives them into being almost fugitive from their fellow men . This feeling is present in all of them . Freedom all restrictions and confinements is the prime target of the movement. It causes a

mood of emotional restlessness ,a dissatisfaction wiith existing order and a desire to escape into an ideal world .This longing for the Ideal , for a utopia is implicit throughout the Romantic poetry .This sense is most dominant in Shelley , his poetry is often a Vague Yearning for the unattainable –

The desire of the moth for the star ,

Of the night for the morrow ,

The devotion to some thing after

From the sphere of our sorrow .

Romanticism is thus the highest yearning for an escape into some unreal and ideal world with the help of imagination .It invokes passion, ecstasy or intensity of feeling or wonder and mystery of feeling that belongs to strange experience. Romantic Imagination is subjective and intuitive.The poet uses words not to signify but to suggest .

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL MOVEMENT

1. Individualism and Subjectivity : Individualism and Subjectivity is the keynote of the Romanticism ,it is an expression of the inner

urges of the soul of the poet .The poet does not care for rules and regulations and give free expressions to his emotion .The writes according to his own fancy and is often guilty of wild excesses . Hence this poetry has been criticized as irregular and wild .

2 .Spontaneity : Romantic poetry is spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings . The poet is gifted with a 'organic sensibility'-he feels more there is to feel and sees more than there is to see. Even utmost ordinary objects and incidents fires up his imagination and fills him with powerful passions . Driven by his powerful passions and excited imaginations the poet does not care for perfection or form or clarity of expression. The result is much vagueness and obscurity.

3. Love for Supernatural: The Romantic poetry is extraordinarily alive to the wonder, mystery and beauty of the universe. The poet feels the presence of unseen powers in nature. This unseen transcendental is more real for him than the world of the senses. The poet has special charm for the stories of fairies, ghost and witch craft. It renders this poetry mystical and removed from the everyday experiences of life.

4. Melancholy: A Romantic poet is a dissatisfied fellow, he may be dissatisfied with the circumstances of his own life, with his age, with literary conventions and traditions of the day or with the

general fate of humanity . Romantic poetry is, therefore often optimistic in tone . A romantic poet may revolt against the existing order and may seek to reform them, or he may try to escape into an imaginative world of his own creation. For this he prefers to escape into the past .The Middle Ages have a special fascination for him, for they not only provide him with an escape from the sordid realities of of the present but also delight his heart by their colour, pageantry and magic .Some times a poet may also dream of a better and happier world to come and build 'utopias' of the future .

5. Love of Nature :Oftentimes the poets escape into Nature – zest for the beauties of the external world is the characteristic of the romantic poetry. The romantic poets transport us away from the suffocating atmosphere of cities into the fresh and energizing company of 'Nature'.

6. Significance of dignity and nobility of man : The hearts of romantic poet overflows with sympathy for the poor and the downtrodden .They glorify the innocenceand simplicity of the common man.They find the Divine in Man ,plead for his emancipation from all bondages and claim equal rights and liberty for the humblest .

7. Revolt against the artificiality of diction : Discarding totally the artificiality and refinement of the diction of the Augustan age ,they liked the language of common man to express their ideas .Wordsworth advocated the use of the language of common man to serve the purposes of poetry . He went to the extent of remarking even that there no essential difference between the language of poetry and that of prose .

8. Interest in old metres and forms : The romantic poets totally discarded the 18th century all purpose metre 'heroic couplet' and liked to revive numerous ancient metres -the Spenserian stanza ,the ballad metre the blank verse, the lyric the ode the sonnet etc. to express their feelings which gained magical popularity . It was accompanied with the renewed interest in the ancient English masters .Chaucer ,Spenser ,Milton etc who had suffered eclipse during the 18th century once again became the chosen models of the poets .Because of all this the Romantic poetry is better known as ' the Romantic Revival Movement ' .

English Romanticism is thus both a revolt and a revival- it is a revolt against the 18th century traditions and conventions and it is revival of ancient metres and masters of poetry .