

Transitional Poets/Pre-Romantic Poets/Precursors of the Romantic Poets

(Part-1)

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Long before the Neo-classical principles of Reason and Correctness came to be challenged on a broad front in the Romantic Age, a new anti-classical spirit had begun to be felt in poetry in the Augustan and the Johnsonian Ages themselves. Deeper cords of the heart began to be stirred, which even the wittiest of the Augustan wits failed to effect. The conventional, bookish and artificially pastoral Nature of the Neo-classical poetry began to give way to a genuine feeling for Mother Nature; the Augustan abhorrence for the toilers of the world gave way to a romantic sympathy. Poetry allowed a readmission of emotions into it at the expense of Good Sense, and at the same time interest in the non-classical, Gothic (synonymous with 'barbaric' in Neo-classicism) past reawakened. The Popean couplet came to be abandoned for the Spenserian and Miltonic poetic forms. During the high time of the Neo-classical poetry of the Johnsonian school, these new sensibilities were exhibited in the poems of certain poets who are loosely grouped together as the Transitional Poets/Precursors of Romanticism.

The Pioneer among the pre-Romantics was James Thomson, who published in 1726 *Winter*, out of which grew successively *Summer* (1727), *Spring* (1728) and ultimately in 1730 *The Seasons*, including *Autumn* and a closing hymn. In each of the poems in *The Seasons*,

among the different phases of the seasons, reflective passages and descriptions of the seasons of other regions are interspersed. Thomson was a keen observer: 'The cherish'd fields/ Put on their winter-robe of purest white.' His transferred epithets betray the reactions of the poet's imagination: '...the mournful grove,/ And the sky saddens with the gathering storm.' In a word, his theme is Nature, its explorer (Newton) and its Creator (God). He constantly acknowledges the Divine Force which 'pervades, /Adjusts, sustains and agitates the whole.' But quite paradoxically great emphasis is laid on the interrelation, not the conflict, between the country and the town. Thomson's frequent response to descriptions of happy, therapeutic use of walks in the rustic envisions of London suggests his penchant for the co-operative functioning of civilisation. *The Castle of Indolence*, an allegory in two cantos, written in Spenserian stanza, attempts to recapture the mood of Spenserian diction. Following Spenser's narrative in the *Bower of Bliss* in *The Faerie Queene*, he describes the Castles and its inhabitants with an undertouch of humour. The choice of Spenserian stanza and vocabulary and the form of the allegorical romance is an interesting testimony to the search for new models and horizons.

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