

## Romantic Poetry/

### What is Romanticism? Was it a Revolt or a Revival? How Was It Affected by the French Revolution? How Were Its Ideals Reflected in the Major

#### Romantic Poetry? (Part-1)

[BA (Hons.), Part-1, Paper-1]

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The Romantic Movement, certainly the most momentous of all poetic movements in the history of English literature, started as a conscious break from the cultured classicism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The scattered attempts of the transitional poets like James Thomson and William Collins gradually gathered a greater force and grew in importance till, in the age of Wordsworth, the spirit of Romanticism began to dominate literature more completely than Classicism had ever done. This ‘liberalism in literature’, as Victor Hugo called it, was simply the expression of life as seen through imagination rather than by prosaic common sense. The similarity between the age of Spenser and Shakespeare on the one hand and that of Wordsworth on the other in wrestling with the interviewing classicism has justified the use of the term ‘**Return to Nature**’ or ‘**Revival of Romanticism**’ to this movement.

But it was also a revolt against the prevailing heroic couplet, the culture of Good Sense and reason, a revolt aided by the most ponderous of contemporary revolutions in Europe, the French Revolution, which wiped out the whole aristocratic system and attempted

to reconstruct society on the basis of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. These ideals fascinated the poets, as Wordsworth hailed the Revolution in his famous lines: 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,/But to be young was very heaven...' The Romantic Movement is always marked by a strong reaction against the bondages of classical rules and customs that generally tend to fetter the free human spirit. While the 18<sup>th</sup> century Classicism confined itself to the clubs and drawing rooms and to the social and political life of London, Romanticism marked a return to Nature and an intense human sympathy and understanding of the human heart. It held the Wordsworthian dictum of poetry as '**the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings**' as the elemental condition of poetry.

Thomson's worshipping of nature as the variegated God reached its culmination in the poetry of Wordsworth, the high priest of Nature. His poetry is a communion with the power or God who shines through all the objects of nature, investing them with a 'celestial light', as in *Immortality Ode*. This mysterious Presence has been addressed in *The Prelude* as 'A motion and a spirit, that impels all thinking things.../All rolls through all things.' But this mystic of Nature is also conscious of its formative influence, its being an educator of senses and mind alike and a teacher of the seeds of our feelings and beliefs. Thus in *The Table's Turned* he observed, 'Our impulses from the vernal wood, / May teach you more than man,/ Of Moral, evil and good...' he also believed that a poet is 'a man speaking to a man.' Thus the poems like *Michael*, *The Idiot Boy* and *Resolution and Independence* present his affectionate studies of common men marked by simplicity and primal emotions.

The most outstanding contribution of Samuel Taylor Coleridge to Romanticism was his treatment of the supernatural. His *Ancient Mariner* fulfils this aim by blending the real and the fantastic, the terrifying and the superstitious. This poem also represents his love for nature: 'He prayeth best, who loveth best/All things both great and small.' In his descriptions,

Coleridge could bring in the mystery and the wonder through his marvellous dream faculty and imagination that led him back to the medieval age to create poems like *Ancient Mariner*, *Kubla Khan* and *Christabel*. The second of these poems gives his theory of poetic creation as the unification of the opposing elements of experience in a state of poetic frenzy.