

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-2)

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

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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.

P.B. Shelley was the most revolutionary of all the Romantics. Although Matthew Arnold called him an 'ineffectual angel', he strived for the establishment of a Utopian society

based on humanity. His rebellious nature can be noted in his well-known pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism*, for which he was expelled from Oxford. In *Prometheus Unbound* he makes his hero the arch-rebel and in *Ode to the West Wind* hails the force of the West Wind to revolutionise. This lyric genius, in the same poem, points out the emotional ecstasy of sadness or angst peculiar to a romantic: 'I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!' Poetry gushed forth from his heart, and that is why Swinburne called him 'the perfect singing God.'

To escape the crushing reality of life which presented only disease, death and frailty of mind, John Keats frequently took refuge in the world of art and beauty marked by permanence. His poetry is thus an escape from transitoriness. The soothing song of the nightingale in *Ode to a Nightingale* and the pastoral beauty of the Grecian Urn in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* fascinate him as the representatives of the world of permanence. He explains in *Endymion*: 'A thing of beauty is joy for ever,' and in *Grecian Urn* he defines Beauty in a new garb: 'Beauty's Truth, Truth Beauty.' Sensuousness was a paramount bias of Keats' genius. He, like a bee, flew from one beautiful object of nature to another tasting honey synaesthetically with all his senses. This love for Beauty and its sensuous enjoyment was a product of his Hellenistic temperament of mind.

Of all the Romantics, Byron was the most controversial in real life and most paradoxical in poetry. Although a grand rush of passion is noted in his poetry, unlike the others he never escaped from society but attacked it while remaining within it. He followed the satirists like Dryden and Pope. His major creation of his early period was the neo-classical satire *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. *Don Juan* was also an epical satire of society. All his heroes in *Cain*, *Manfred*, *Don Juan* and *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* are proud, self-central and tortured outcasts in revolt against the social order and authority.

