Romantic poetry

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Jump to navigation Jump to search

The Funeral of Shelley by Louis Edouard Fournier (1889); the group members, from left to right, are Trelawny, Hunt and Byron

Romantic poetry is the poetry of the Romantic era, an artistic, literary, musical and intellectual movement that originated in Europe toward the end of the 18th century. It involved a reaction against prevailing Enlightenment ideas of the 18th century, and lasted from 1800 to 1850, approximately.

Contents

• 1 English Romantic poetry
  o 1.1 Characteristics of English Romantic poetry
    ▶ 1.1.1 The Sublime
    ▶ 1.1.2 Reaction against Neoclassicism
    ▶ 1.1.3 Imagination
    ▶ 1.1.4 Nature poetry
    ▶ 1.1.5 Melancholy
    ▶ 1.1.6 Medievalism
    ▶ 1.1.7 Hellenism
    ▶ 1.1.8 Supernaturalism
    ▶ 1.1.9 Subjectivity
• 2 France
• 3 Germany
  o 3.1 Jena Romanticism
  o 3.2 Heidelberg Romanticism
• 4 Poland
• 5 Russia
  o 5.1 Influence of British Romantic poetry
• 6 Sweden
• 7 Spain
• 8 United States
• 9 See also
• 10 References
• 11 Bibliography

English Romantic poetry [edit]
Main articles: Romantic literature in English, English poetry, and Romantic sonnets

In early 19th century England, the poet William Wordsworth defined his and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's innovative poetry in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798):

I have said before that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin in emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.

The poems of *Lyrical Ballads* intentionally re-imagined the way poetry should sound: "By fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men," Wordsworth and his English contemporaries, such as Coleridge, John Keats, Percy Shelley, and William Blake, wrote poetry that was meant to boil up from serious, contemplative reflection over the interaction of humans with their environment. Although many stress the notion of spontaneity in Romantic poetry, the movement was still greatly concerned with the difficulty of composition and of translating these emotions into poetic form. Indeed, Coleridge, in *On Poesy or Art*, sees art as "the mediatress between, and reconciler of nature and man". Such an attitude reflects what might be called the dominant theme of English Romantic poetry: the filtering of natural emotion through the human mind in order to create meaning.

In the Western cultural context, romanticism substantially contributed to the idea of what a real poet should look like. An idealized statue of a Czech man Karel Hynek Mácha (in Petřín Park, Prague) represents him as a slim, tender and perhaps unhealthy boy. However, he had in reality a strong, robust and muscular body.

**Characteristics of English Romantic poetry**

**The Sublime**

One of the most important concepts in Romantic poetry.

**Reaction against Neoclassicism**

Romantic poetry contrasts with neoclassical poetry, which was the product of intellect and reason, while romantic poetry is more the product of emotion. Romantic poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth century was a reaction against the set standards, conventions of eighteenth century poetry. According to William J. Long, "The Romantic Movement was marked, and is always marked, by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom which in science and theology as well as literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit."
Belief in the importance of the imagination is a distinctive feature of romantic poets such as John Keats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and P. B. Shelley, unlike the neoclassical poets. Keats said, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth.” For Wordsworth and William Blake, as well as Victor Hugo and Alessandro Manzoni, the imagination is a spiritual force, is related to morality, and they believed that literature, especially poetry, could improve the world. The secret of great art, Blake claimed, is the capacity to imagine. To define imagination, in his poem "Auguries of Innocence", Blake said:

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.

Nature poetry[edit]

Love for nature is another important feature of romantic poetry, as a source of inspiration. This poetry involves a relationship with external nature and places, and a belief in pantheism. However, the romantic poets differed in their views about nature. Wordsworth recognized nature as a living thing, teacher, god and everything. These feelings are fully developed and expressed in his epic poem The Prelude. In his poem "The Tables Turn" he writes:

One impulse from the vernal wood  
Can teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and good,  
Than all sages can.

Shelley was another nature poet, who believed that nature is a living thing and there is a union between nature and man. Wordsworth approaches nature philosophically, while Shelley emphasises the intellect. John Keats is another a lover of nature, but Coleridge differs from other romantic poets of his age, in that he has a realistic perspective on nature. He believes that nature is not the source of joy and pleasure, but rather that people’s reactions to it depends on their mood and disposition. Coleridge believed that joy does not come from external nature, but that it emanates from the human heart.

Melancholy[edit]

Melancholy occupies a prominent place in romantic poetry, and is an important source of inspiration for the Romantic poets. In "Ode to a Nightingale", Keats wrote:

..........for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call’d him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

Medievalism[edit]

Romantic poetry was attracted to nostalgia, and medievalism is another important characteristic of romantic poetry, especially in the works of John Keats and Coleridge. They were attracted to exotic, remote and obscure places, and so they were more attracted to Middle Ages than to their own age.

Hellenism[edit]

The world of classical Greece was important to the Romantics. John Keats' poetry is full of allusions to the art, literature and culture of Greek, as for example in "Ode on a Grecian Urn".

Supernaturalism[edit]
Most of the romantic poets used supernatural elements in their poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge is the leading romantic poet in this regard, and "Kubla Khan" is full of supernatural elements.

**Subjectivity**[edit]

Romantic poetry is the poetry of sentiments, emotions and imagination. Romantic poetry opposed the objectivity of neoclassical poetry. Neoclassical poets avoided describing their personal emotions in their poetry, unlike the Romantics.