

7. ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE (THE 19TH CENTURY)

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a) William Wordsworth;

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a) George Gordon Byron;

b) Percy Busshe Shelley;

c) John Keats.

1. Historical Background.

Definition of the term.

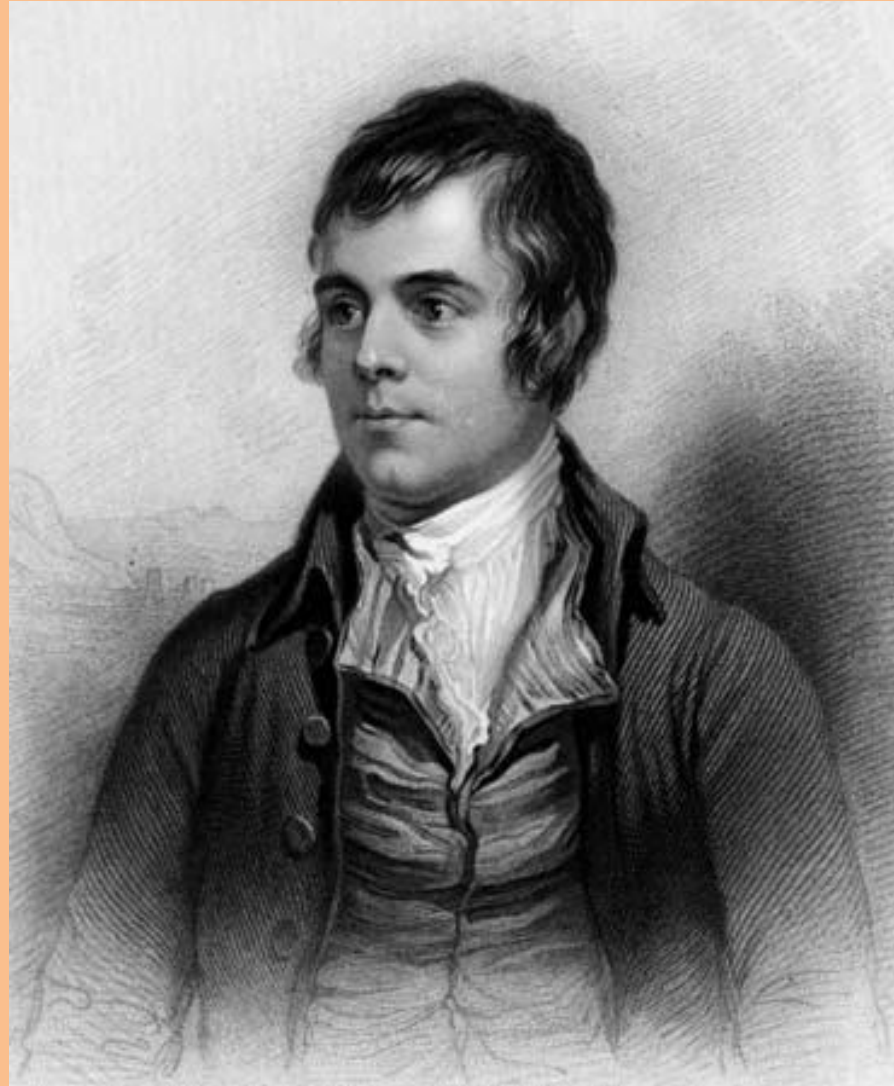
Romanticism was the greatest literary movement in the period between 1770- 1840. It meant the shift of sensibility in art and literature and was based on interdependence of Man and Nature. It was a style in European art, literature and music that emphasized the importance of feeling, emotion and imagination rather than reason or thought. Romanticism in literature was the reaction of the society not only to the French Revolution of 1789 but also to the Enlightenment connected with it.

The Romantic writers based their theories on the intuition and the wisdom of the heart. They hoped to find a way of changing the social order by their writing , they believed in literature being a sort of Mission to be carried out in order to reach the wisdom of the Universe.

The Romantic Revival in English Literature of the 18th -19th centuries can be divided into three periods: the Early Romantics, the Lakists and the Later Romantics.

2. The Early Romanticism

Robert Burns



The most outstanding representative of the Early Romanticism in England was Robert Burns. He was born on 25 January , 1759 in Alloway, Ayrshire in Scotland. His father was the gardener on a small estate. Although he was poor William Burnes' greatest wish was to give his children the best education. And while they were still young, he began to teach them to read and write. Robert's teacher were the folk songs and ballads of his country. He knew a great deal of them by heart. When Robert was 13, he had to take over most of the work from his father , who was growing old. He wrote his first poem at 14. The poem was inspired by and devoted to a young girl with whom Robert work in the fields. Those were hard times. Robert often suffered from illnesses- the heart disease – because of the hard work and little food. But despite the hard times , the 15- year-old Robert continued to write.

Burns wrote many poems in English, but his best verses are written in the dialect of his own country, Scotland.

Among them are “Auld Lang Syne”, “My Heart’s in the Highlands”, “My Love is Like a Red Red Rose” and any others. Burns sang the beauty and the glory of his native land. His poems touch the heart and soul of every reader.

Burns travelled much throughout Scotland collecting folk-tales and ballads. When he was offered money for this work , he refused to take any , though he was always short of money. His work was inspired by pure patriotism and love for his people and their poetry.

Robert Burns died when he was only 37 years of age (on the 21 of July, 1796). His early death was due to the fact that all his life he lived in poverty, all his life the lack of money made him work physically beyond his strength. He was buried with military honours on the 25th of July.

Now Robert Burns is considered the national poet of Scotland , and January 25 – the date of his birth – is always celebrated by Scotsmen.

My Love is Like a Red Red Rose

My love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June :
My love is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in love am I :
And I will love thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

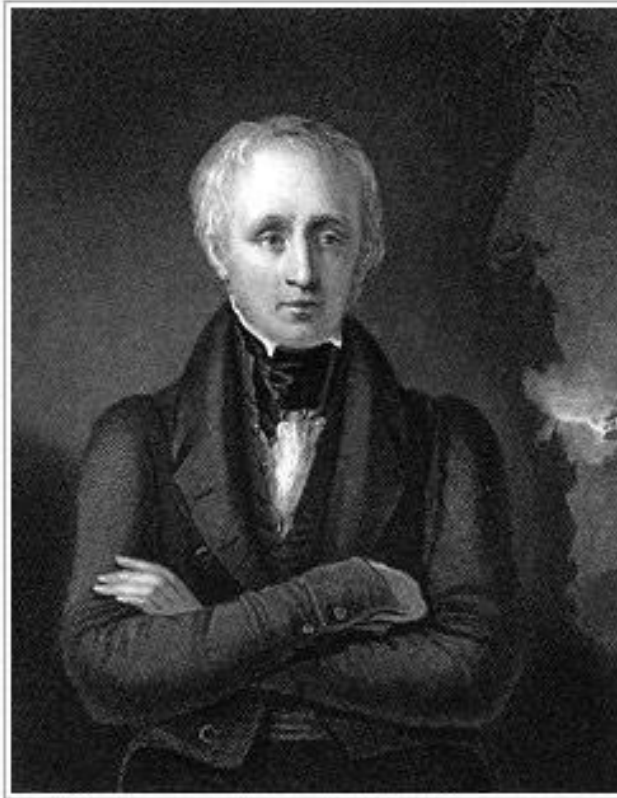
Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun :
And I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only love,
And fare thee weel a while !
And I will come again, my love,
Thou' it were ten thousand mile.

3. The Lakists

The next period is represented by Samuel Coleridge and William Wordsworth. They were admirers of the French Revolution. They both escaped from the evils of big cities and settled in the quietness of country life in the purity of nature, among country-folk. *Living in the Lake country of Northern England, they were known as the Lakists.*

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)



William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the bright representative of the second period of English Romanticism called the Lake Period. He was born in Cumberland in 1770 and educated in Cambridge. Like Coleridge, he graduated from the University without taking a degree. Like Coleridge, he was fond of the French Revolution, and his creative work started under its influence. Like Coleridge, he was disappointed in it some time later. Like Coleridge, he escaped from the urban way of life and sought for inspiration in nature. Thus he met with Coleridge in the Lake District in the North of England. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth was a romantic poet and philosopher. The term “Lake School”(“Lakists”) was applied to them by their contemporaries and it still used by the critics.

Wordsworth is at his best in descriptions of natural sceneries:

*The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:-
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.*

Samuel Coleridge

(1772-1834)



Samuel Coleridge (1772- 1834) was born in Devonshire in 1772. His father was a priest and wanted his son to follow his deed. Coleridge was educated at Cambridge, but he graduated from the University without taking a degree. Nevertheless, Coleridge was one of the most educated men of his time. Inspired by the French Revolution he began writing both political and lyrical poetry:

*All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame.*

Coleridge spent a long time in the beautiful Lake country in the North of England. In 1799 he lived in Germany, studying German literature and philosophy. He became not only a romantic poet but also a philosopher and literary critic. On return Coleridge lost his faith in Revolution and started contributions to conservative press. His marriage was unfortunate and he became an opium addict.

Wordsworth and Coleridge together composed and published a small volume of poems under the title “Lyrical Ballads”.

“The Lakists” were conservative in their world outlook. Even though they had welcomed the French Revolution and appeal to freedom and equality for all at the beginning , later they turned away from revolutionary ideas. They tried to avoid the contradictions and wrote, about the life of the countryside in a popular form of verse, known and understandable by all.

4. The Later Romantics

George Gordon Byron (1788- 1824), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats(1795-1821) were the representatives of the highest level of the Age of Romanticism and all the three were greatly influenced by the Lakists.

Unlike the Conservative Lake poets , the Later romantics were progressive poets. They were young revolutionary rebels talented and fascinating. Byron called the style of William Wordsworth “dull and simple”, while his own poetic manner is often vivid and vigorous. his noble origin , charm, mysterious love affairs, a great lyrical power established him as a Romantic poet and rebellious aristocrat.

Byron’s friend Percy Bysshe Shelley , also a revolutionary idealist, the lover of classical poetry, was very metaphorical.

John Keats was the youngest among the Revolutionary Romantics. He died at 25 of tuberculosis. The style of his poetry was lofty and very lyrical. Keats was fond of writing odes. His talent made him the poet mysterious and charming. Keats deeply felt the interdependence of Man and Nature and in his “Ode to a Nightingale” emphasized the contrast between the ugliness of Life and the beauty of the world of Nature.

George Gordon Byron



G. G. Byron was born in London on 22d of January 1788 in an old aristocratic family. His mother came of a rich Scottish family. His father was a poor army officer who spent his wife's money very soon and died when the boy was three years old. George spent his childhood in Scotland , where he went to a Grammar school. He liked history and read much about Rome, Greece and Turkey. The boy was born lame, but he liked sports and trained every day. He could ride a horse very well, was a champion swimmer , a boxer and took part in athletic activities.

In 1798, when George was 10, his grand-uncle died and the boy inherited the family estate, and the title of lord and later became a member of the House of Lords. When he was 17 , Byron entered Cambridge University and there his literary career began. He travelled much, he visited Portugal, Spain, Greece and Turkey and described his travels in a long , partly autobiographical poem **“Child Harold’s Pilgrimage”**. Thus poem was published in 1812 and made Byron famous. This is a poem about travel, history and politics.

It consists of 4 cantos. It is written in a 9-line stanza with the last line lengthened. The character of Child Harold is symbolic. Byron describes his own outlook: demand for absolute personal freedom.

It was the time after the first bourgeois revolution in France when the reactionary governments of Europe were trying to kill freedom. The Industrial Revolution developed in England and many people lost their work. Byron hated exploitation and sympathized with the working class. In his first speech in Parliament Byron defended the English proletariat and accused the Government for the exploitation of workers. In 1816 Byron left England forever. In Italy he joined the Italian movement for national liberation against Austrian oppression.

After the suppression of the Italian movement for independence , Byron went to Greece and joined the Greeks in their struggle for liberty against the Turks. There he fell ill with typhus and died when he was only 36 years old.

Byron's poems: "Child Harold's Pilgrimage", "Don Juan", "The Corsair " and others have always been popular among progressive people of the world.

