

# THE ROMANTIC REVOLT.

## (1) General Survey

Neo Classicism stood for 3 things: (1) poetry imitated nature to delight and to instruct (2) it had distinct kinds to which each new writing must conform. (3) the poet must follow the rule of the ancients.

But Neo-classicists too had some reservations: (unconscious protest against the dogmatism of the critical laws for different lands.)  
eg Pope admitted the possibility of lucky licence.. and of different

Dr Johnson, Dryden and Addison questioned all rules that did not stand the test of experience.

Dryden: Better a mechanic rule were stretched and broken than a great beauty were omitted.

Addison: there is sometimes a greater judgement shown in deviating from the rules of art than in adhering to them.

Dr. Johnson: there was always an appeal open from the rules of criticism to nature.

Hence began an intense questioning that was ultimately to subvert the old law and proclaim a new one in its place. i.e individual liberty in letters as in life.

"Changes are always but developments; they are never complete severances".

## The Romantic Creed

- opposed all regimentation in literature that left 'nothing to freedom and Nature'. It judged a work of art by its end rather than by its means.
- its test of goodness was its capacity 'to please always and please all', delight as the object of literature. But it was achieved not by a mechanical application of rules but by the power of imagination or the poet's intuitive and emotional reaction to his subject.
- 'Critics are apt to forget' said Coleridge, 'that rules are but means to an end; consequently, where the ends are different, the rules must be likewise so.'

## Factors Responsible for the Change

① Continental influence, particularly that of France and Germany:  
Rousseau's social and political writings, that challenged the established  
order. For he challenged all 'that was right only because it was  
established': royal absolutism, aristocratic privilege, religious dogmatism,  
and other abuse of authority that interfered with the natural  
rights and liberty of man. In politics it resulted in French  
Revolution, and in literary sphere it resulted in Romantic Movement  
with its stress on individuality and impatience with the  
arbitrary edicts of legislators' : France

Germany → Two Schlegel brothers and Schelling.

Schlegel: defined classicism as an artistic quest for a beautifully  
ordered world and romanticism as a secret longing for the chaos that is underlying  
Creation and striving for new births. The one creates 'the orderly',  
the other the picturesque. As the world, however, is not the  
orderly thing that classicism makes it out to be, romanticism  
that is fascinated by its sweet disorder' is 'nearest to the  
mystery of the world/universe'. Schelling stressed the role of  
imagination in art which he described as vision and therefore  
an individual experience of the artist rather than a matter  
of rule and compass. Both strove to substitute the aesthetic  
for the formal criticism of letters.

In England, this study was further strengthened by the study  
of native medieval literature eg ballad, romance and the  
like.

## William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

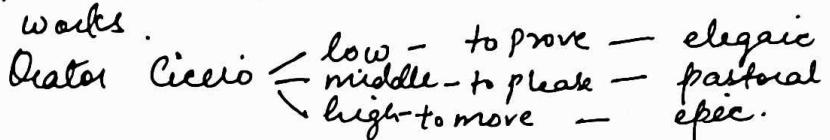
Stimulus: 'Lyrical Ballads' (1798) was violently attacked by the neo-classical critics of the Edinburgh and the Quarterly Reviews.

Preface to the second edition of the 'Lyrical Ballads' dated in 1800, further revised in 1802 & 1815.  
(Appendix) (Essay Supplement)

→ In all of them 'Wordsworth's subject is poetic diction and his view of poetry.'

### Neo Classical Poetic Diction

Spenser → preferred archaic language to that vogue in his day.  
Milton had a predilection for the uncommon in word and phrase in his great works.

Great Roman Orator Cicero  
  
low - to prove - elegiac  
middle - to please - pastoral  
high - to move - epic.

The 18<sup>th</sup> C reduced these three categorizations to only two - low & high: low and lofty.

It summarily rejected low words and phrases unfit for poetic use because they lose their power to impress because of being too familiar.

Dr Johnson found the technical ones to be unfit for poetic use because they are unintelligible as they are uncommon in use.

They favoured: a system of words at once ~~unrefined from~~ the grossness of domestic use and free from the harshness of terms appropriate to particular arts.

It differed from the diction of prose by its 'happy combination of words' or 'flowers of speech' plucked from the bramble of current forms of expression.

But in the hands of judicious & versifiers it soon degenerated into artifice, bereft of all the grace.

→ In this way, poetry drifted away from natural expression altogether.

## Wordsworth's Concept of Poetic Diction

His principle object in second edition was to choose incident and situations from common life and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.

Why only low and rustic life? because it was free from all outside influences, men speak from their own personal experiences and convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Such a language is a more permanent and a far more philosophical language.

Against neoclassical diction bcoz they separate themselves from the sympathies of men and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression in order to furnish food for fickle tastes and fickle appetites of their own creation.

Wordsworth avoided in his poetic diction: personifications of abstract ideas, phrases and figures of speech like periphrasis, inversion, antithesis and other devices.

## Language of Poetry VS Language of Prose

Wordsworth by giving an example from Gray's Sonnet 'On the Death of Richard West' concludes 'that there neither is, nor can be any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition'

Wordsworth admits the possibilities of 'flowers of speech' metaphors "lead him to passions, ... language dignified and variegated and alive with metaphors and figures."

On metre, he replied he is only recommending 'a selection of language really spoken by men' and that this selection wherever it is made will itself form a distinction... separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and if metre be superadded, a dissimilitude would set in altogether sufficient for gratification of rational mind.