

Precursors of the Romantic Movement

So between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, there arose a group of poets who clearly foreshadowed the coming of an age dominated by the spirit of nature. They are called the harbingers or the precursors of the Romantic movement. The poets broke through the tradition and the spirit of the age of reason and common sense and infused a new freshness, breadth of vision, 'sharpened sensibility' and 'lightened imaginative feeling' in their poems. They loved nature and natural phenomena. In the words of Hudson - "The growth of a love of nature and a feeling for the picturesque - is one of the most marked and interesting general features in the history of English poetry between Pope and Wordsworth." The introduction of Nature in the

late eighteenth century came as a shock and surprise to the people who preferred to hear of the City and coffee houses. "Nature in its wilder and more rugged aspects shocked the refined taste of a generation which had been trained to prefer the garden to the unspoilt hillside."

It was in the writings of Allan Ramsay that the reviving love of Nature first became conspicuous. His 'The Gentle Shepherd' is a real pastoral poem. In England the spirit came through the works of another Scotsman named James Thomson. A new note of freshness was sounded through 'The Seasons'. It is a poem in four parts and is descriptive in nature. It is true that its bombastic style, didacticism and latinised vocabulary put it to the Augustan age but the poem provides us with real landscape paintings. The poem has been written in

Spenserian stanza and emulates the manner and style of 'The Faerie Queene'. James Thomson had a sympathetic heart. He was sympathetic to birds and animals. His other poems are 'Liberty' and 'The Castle of Indolence'. It is said that among the precursors he is the forerunner. Peter Westland is of a different view. According to him the Countess of Winchilsea is the first poetess and 'Nocturnal Riverie' is the first poem with Romantic tinge.

Other important poets of the period are

- (1) Oliver Goldsmith :- Born in Ireland and initially educated at a village he came to Trinity College, Dublin. His first poem is 'The Traveller' and then came the most famous of his poems entitled 'The Deserted Village'. It abounds in charming pictures of village life. He has written a humorous ballad entitled 'Elegy on the

'Death of a mad Dog' and a longer piece 'Retaliation'. Coleridge is a traditional poet stretching one hand to the past and the other to the coming age.

(2) Thomas Percy :- He is not famous for any original poetry in English literature but for a collection of old ballads entitled 'The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry'. The book seems to inspire Romantic Revival. Wordsworth himself wrote of this collection in 1815.

(3) Thomas Chatterton :- Son of a poor schoolmaster and a cathedral singer was born in 1752 but committed suicide before he was eighteen years of age. His 'Rowley poems' is very famous. The MSS, he said, was found in an antique chest in a church. Very soon it was found out that the poems were forgeries but this can not diminish the value of poems like 'The Battle of Hastings', 'Aella' or 'The

'Ballad of Chantry'. The spirit of the poet is essentially Romantic. Keats' 'The Eve of St. Agnes' bears some resemblance with 'The Ballad of Chantry'.

- (4) Thomas Gray :- He began by writing as a classicist and ended by becoming a Romanticist. In the first period he began by writing in 1748 'On the Alliance of Education and Government'. Other poems of the first period are 'Ode on the Spring', 'On a Distant Prospect of Eton College' and 'To Adversity'. In the second period he wrote his famous 'Elegy' which belongs to the 'Churchyard' school of poetry. In the third period he produced Pindaric odes entitled 'The Progress of the Poetry' and 'The Bard'. These poems show Gray's march towards Romanticism. His last poems like 'The Fatal Sisters' and 'The Desert of

from the antiquaries. There he entertained himself by writing verses which he later published under the title 'Poetical Sketches'. His important poems are 'Songs of Innocence', 'Songs of Experience', 'The marriage of Heaven and Hell', 'The Gates of Paradise' and 'The Vision of the Daughters of Albion'.

Blake drew his inspiration from 'Nature'. His poems are like the singing of the happy child expressed with the art of man. He saw in the simple joys and raptures of ordinary life a paradise regained.

The end.

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odes' are fundamentally romantic. Gray seems to be a history of Romantic movement in epitome.

(5) William Collins :- Like Thomas Gray he is also not a very prolific writer. His work is very small in bulk. His 'Persian Eclogues' has been written in the style of Pope. His fame rests on his 'odes' where he stands out as a lyric writer. His longest ode is 'Ode to Liberty', 'Ode to Passion' and 'Ode to Evening' are among his finest compositions. The 'ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands' is a long ode and foreshadows the supernatural and superstitious elements in Coleridge's poetry. As a lyric writer he is the best among his contemporaries.

(6) William Blake :- He was at once a poet and an artist. He had been to a drawing school to learn to draw