



The Romantic Revival (1800 - 1850)

Historical Background

During the late 18th century, Democracy and opportunity for the masses was a thought that was becoming more and more popular. Many citizens who had not benefited from the victory of Parliament in the Civil War voiced their discontent. The United States declared independence in 1776 and in 1789 the French Revolution violently ended the power of the monarchy and aristocracy in France. The new philosophy of the rights of all men was expressed both in politics and literature. This new form philosophy became one of the main guidelines of a new school of Romantic poets, writers and philosophers.

It was at this time that the government extended the right to vote to the middle classes because of the threat of a popular revolution. The working classes however were not allowed to do so until the very end of the 19th century. The working class survived under awful conditions. As the migration from an agricultural society to an industrial society gathered force, towns became cities, the population grew out of control and more and more villagers, forced by economic necessity to seek work in the growing factories, crowded together in dirty slums. Men, women and children worked from sunrise to sunset for insignificant wages. During this so called Industrial Revolution no child who was able to pull a cart in the polluted coal mines or sweep a floor in a

factory, was considered too young to work. The poor had practically no access to education.

The Romantic spirit affected practically every aspect of English life reflected the effects of revolutions abroad, the demand for more democratic government and a growing awareness of social injustices. Artificiality was superseded by simplicity and naturalness as characterization of this new era. There was a resurgence of interest in wild and lonely portions of forest or mountains instead of manicured gardens. Architecture tried to recapture the mysterious atmosphere of the Middle Ages and rejected the rigid Classical style. Dress, too, became more simple and natural.

The Romantic sense that had in the past been so strongly felt during the Elizabethan Age, and had been repressed during the Augustan Age, was back again. The British cast off the Augustan restraint in a more daring and imaginative approach to both literature and life. The Augustan idea of order and reason were not supported by the realities of life and thus were rejected. Romanticism represents a revolt against Reason as the only supreme guide in all areas of living and rejects the idea that life can be reduced to a few scientific formulas. The prevailing point of view was a personal and subjective one.

The Development of the Language

Because 18th century English had often proved limited and artificial, poets and novelists of the Romantic Period looked for inspiration to the folk ballads and the speech of everyday life. The 18th century idea of creating a majestic literary English which was different in style from spoken English was rejected. Since the beginning of the 19th century, written English has become progressively less formal and closer to the spoken language.

At this time Greek began to have a direct effect upon the language. Many new philosophical and scientific words were being added to English. Combining two or more words or roots from Latin or Greek was a popular way of forming scientific words. This process created words such as *Barometer* and *thermometer*. Another way of creating new names was the addition of Greek prefixes and suffixes such as *micro-* (small), *macro-* (large), *tele-* (far), *per-* (maximum), *-oid* (like), *-ic* (smaller), *-ous* (larger), to names already in use. Therefore such modern words as *microskirt*, *macroeconomics*, *telephone*, *peroxide*, *paranoid*, *sulphuric* and *sulphurous* were added to the English Language.

Clear across the Atlantic, in North America, English was also changing; before 1750 American speech was probably very similar to that of England. However, by the year 1800, differences in pronuncia-

tion began to take place. For example, during the late 18th century, speakers in England had turned to using an 'ah' sound in words like 'path', 'ask', 'glass'. Most speakers in America, which had recently become independent, were not affected by the British trend and continued to pronounce these words with the flat 'a' sound heard in 'cat' and 'man'. This difference, one of the most noticeable, can still be observed today.

British and American differences in spelling also originated in this period. Most of them are the due to the work of an American named Webster, who was interested in spelling reform. He concluded that it would be more convenient as well as more practical to use a simplified form of spelling certain words, eg; *honor* instead of *honour*, *color* instead of *colour*, *wagon* instead of *waggon*. He registered these spellings in his dictionary which was widely read and came to be regarded as the authoritative opinion on spelling in America.

What the Romantic Period most importantly contributed to the development of the English language was its movement away from the rigidity of the Augustan Age to a much more colorful and flexible language, similar to that which had existed during the Elizabethan Age.

Romantic Poetry



William Wordsworth - The World is too much with us

Wordsworth said "*Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*". He received a philosophical strength from nature. He believed man and Nature are manifestations of the same force and man's maturity is marked by an awareness of this truth.

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!¹
The sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything we are out of tune;
It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus² rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreath'd horn.

¹ favour

² mythological Triton sea gods

Samuel Coleridge - Extracts from '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*'

Coleridge is famous for his ability to stimulate the imagination through his imagery and his melody. He brought the sense of mystery and wonder back into English poetry. '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*' - a long lyrical ballad, tells the story of the cursed results of killing an albatross at sea. The power of the poem lies in the moving, terrifying description of various experiences that occurred. A surreal atmosphere is created by the supernatural happenings.



...Down dropped the breeze the sails dropped down,
'Twas as sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea.

All in a hot and copper sky.
The bloody sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We struck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot, Oh Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

... And every tongue, through utter drought,
Was withered at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rime_of_the_Ancient_Mariner

DISCUSSION:

'The World is too much with us'

1. What is the meaning of the first four lines, the second six lines, the last four lines?
2. What is the theme of the poem?
3. What is the tone of the poem?

'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'

1. What is the meaning of each stanza?
2. Describe the atmosphere of this extract, cite words, phrases and vivid images that contribute to the overall atmosphere. How do both these poems reflect the society and times in which they were written?

The Romantic Novel

Sir Walter Scott found in past history the material for creating the Romantic Historical novel which was to become a classic in English literature. His novels take the reader into a world of Romantic illusion; in his books, life becomes adventurous and heroic, in contrast with the increasing dullness of industrial Britain. His goal as a novelist was to take the reader away from the stark reality of that life.

'*Ivanhoe*' is a novel set in 12th century England. Although based on fact, Scott's view of medieval 'Merrie England' is an idealized one.



'IVANHOE'

"Why, how call you those grunting brutes running about on their four legs?" demanded Wamba.

"Swine, fool, swine," said the herd³, "every fool knows that."

"And swine is good Saxon," said the Jester, "but how call you the sow when she is flayed, and drawn⁴, and quartered, and hung up by the heels like a traitor?"

"Pork," answered the swineherd

"I am very glad every fool knows that too," said Wamba, "and Pork, I think, is good Norman-French; and so when the brute lives, and is in the charge of a Saxon slave, she goes by her Saxon name, but becomes a Norman, and is called pork, when she is carried, to the Castle-hall to feast among the nobles; what dost thou think of this, friend Gurth, ha?"

"It is but too true doctrine, friend Wamba, however it got into thy fool's pate⁵."

"Nay, I can tell you more," said Wamba, in the

same tone; "old Alderman Ox continues to hold his Saxon epithet, while he is under the charge of serfs and bondsmen such as thou, but becomes Beef, a fiery French gallant, when he arrives before the worshipful jaws that are destined to consume him. Mynheer⁶ Calf, too, becomes Monsieur de Veau in the like manner; he is Saxon when he requires tendance, and takes a Norman name when he becomes matter of enjoyment."

"By St. Dunstan," answered Gurth, "thou speakest but sad truths, little is left to us but the air we breathe, and that appears to have been reserved with much hesitation, solely for the purpose of enabling us to endure the tasks they lay upon our shoulders. The finest and the fattest is for their board, the loveliest is for their conch, the best and the bravest supply their foreign masters with soldiers, and withen⁷ distant lands with their bones, leaving few here who have either will or the power to protect the unfortunate Saxon."

³ swineherd

⁴ removal of intestines

⁵ head (archaic)

⁶ Mr. (Saxon)

⁷ to litter (archaic)

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the meaning of the discussion between Wamba, the Jester and Gurth, the Swineherd?
2. How do these extracts reflect Scott's aims as a Romantic writer?
3. What information about society at that time (about A.D. 1200) does it convey?