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## Romanticism in Poetry: Examples

Literature / Second Year

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## **Introduction:**

We should remember that the Romantics chose imagination and feeling as a method of understanding reality and arriving at absolute truth. They also opposed Neoclassicists' belief that humans are born sinful, immoral, and barbaric, and that the state, law, and civilisation are what cultivate them. The Romantics, however, embraced the view that human beings are born innocent and "innately good" and that what make them savage and inhuman are institutions and laws, combined with their detachment from nature. In this lesson, we will see a few examples of the central characteristics of Romanticism, mostly in poetry, citing well-known poets and works such as *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection of poems published by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798. In his preface to their *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth discusses at length the importance of ordinary life as the focus of poetry, the adaptation of everyday language to poetry, and the unity of the poem woven by feelings, not by plot or action.

### **I. The difference between traditional and Literary ballads:**

Originated in the Middle Ages, the traditional ballad is a song that tells a tale or a narrative of folk songs, conveyed orally. It has an unknown author. Since many singers say and repeat it, it takes different forms and tones. It is a tale narrated through dialogues and actions. The traditional ballad does not express personal feelings or attitudes, simply narrating stories without any self-reference.

The literary ballad, however, is an imitation of the traditional ballad in style, spirit and form. In comparison to the traditional one, it adds the first-person narrator or teller, making it subjective and personal. This new form of poetry was first introduced in Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. It has a known writer who expresses personal

feelings, needs and judgements, such as Wordsworth's poem in the *Lyrical Ballads*, "We Are Seven".

## **II. Romanticism in Poetry: Illustration**

### **1. Nature as a Source of Pleasure and Joy:**

Wordsworth's "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" sets out the importance of nature in reviving the poet's memories and hopes. He details how he vividly recalls the woods and lofty cliffs, the river Wye, that he visited five years ago.

Wordsworth stands amazed at the tranquillity and repose induced by nature:

While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and food

He imagines the old landscape and compares it to the present physical setting. Thus, the poet's imaginative mind is fuelled by past memories and blissful moments spent with nature. Wordsworth represents nature as a source of relief from the stress of urban life, envisaging it as a gentle force that controls people's feelings. This revisit to nature has enriched and elevated the poet's understanding of life and connection with nature. This may also help us grasp the true essence of poetry inspired by the peaceful serenity of nature, as Wordsworth writes, "all good poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'".

### **2. Romantic Exoticism:**

The exotic is everything that is associated with wild landscapes or remote or alien uncivilised cultures. Due to their abhorrence of the upper classes, the Romantics loved exotic stories, unusual tradition, the Middle Ages, and ethnic cultures. The example is "La Belle Dame sans Mercy" by John Keats:

I met a lady in the meads,  
Full beautiful—a faery's child,  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild.

Keats' poem tells the story of a knight seduced by the beauty and singing of a fairy lady who later lulls him to sleep, dreaming of pale knights, warriors, death, and so on. As a typical example of the Romantics' obsession with the exotic, this poem narrates how imagination plays a great role in portraying distant lands without ever visiting them.

#### **4. Romantic Union with Nature:**

Romantic unity with nature means that the poet personifies nature, or one of its phenomena, into a spirit that breathes, thinks, feels, experiences, lives, dies etc. Having done so, through imagination, and with an invitation to be granted perfection and eternity of bliss and life, he or she may enter into a spiritual union with nature. To exemplify, we can cite Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind":

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;	My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;	Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share	Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!
Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:	And, by the incantation of this verse,
What if my leaves are falling like its own!	Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies	Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,	Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit	The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
fierce,	If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Percy Bysshe Shelley devoted his poem, "Ode to the West Wind", to writing about how the poet craves unity with the West Wind or nature, in general. He first wishes to be a dead leaf, a light cloud, or a rolling wave blown and swept by the wind. He

wanted to be an instrument for the wind to play upon, which is similar to the music generated by the wind when it blows through the trees of the forest: (“Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is: / What if my leaves are falling like its own!”). Here, we notice that the poet’s sensitive soul resembles the sad tone produced by the wind as it blows through the leaves of a tree in autumn. Finally, he aspires to be in perfect harmony with nature until they become one, articulating the ultimate aim and hope of every Romantic poet: (My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!”).

### **5. Dejection:**

The Romantics objected to the belief that reason could solve problems and settle conflicts and disagreements; they perceived the danger of the use of reason instead of feelings. Feelings assert what is wrong or right. They became increasingly dissatisfied and unhappy as they had to deal with an outside world that was fragmented, hypocritical, and alienating. A good example is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's

"Dejection: An Ode":

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live:  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!  
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,

### **Conclusion:**

In this lesson we have drawn a few examples of how to approach romantic poetry, especially identifying the features we had previously studied in the last lesson. We have also tried to explain the Romantics’ the glorification of nature that was triggered by their intense desire for harmony with nature's spirit. In a sentence, the Romantics worshipped Nature.

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