CHAPTER I

CONCEPT OF ROMANTICISM AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS
AS IN ENGLISH POETRY

No literary trend confines itself to a definite period or to a particular place alone. It casts its shadow long before its actual appearance and lingers to a time well beyond its replacement by another major trend. Literary trends or tendencies thus tend to elude any exact definition. Yet critics have tried to define different literary trends or tendencies by analysing their nature and characteristics and also stated aims and objectives, if any.

Of all the epochs in English literature, it is the Romantic epoch that resists such definition most. Different critics have approached the term "Romanticism" and analysed and defined it in their own ways; but even after apparent success in their efforts, they have to declare the term "vague". It has, for all the time, proved elusive, and thus has allured the inquisitive minds for frequent quest after it. Friedrich Schlegel's terms "infinite" and "progressive" have come to be the familiar epithets attached to Romanticism and they seem to indicate the elasticity characteristic of this trend and also its plurality.

In spite of the elusiveness of the artistic temperaments, history of literature has been divided into different periods with different names. This has been done because at a particular period a particular tendency is found dominating the popular imagination which ultimately creates a particular kind of literature. Some definitely notable features become salient for the literature of the time and pervade the atmosphere and come to be called by a common name that represents it till the sensibility of the people changes in preference of other tendencies. But this does not signify that other traits are totally expelled from the intellectual milieu of the time. A period of literature or art may, indeed, have two courses – one historical and the other perennial. Henry H.H. Remak has defined the latter course as the "for ever recurring emotional condition." Its independence of time and place explains many confusing demonstrations. "Archetypal" is the word that Lilian R. Furst has used to connote such existence of any sensibility. In this light H.J. C. Grierson's reference to Plato as the "first great romantic" seems only natural. Romanticism in William Collins (1721-59), Thomas Gray (1716-71), William Blake (1757-1827) and Goethe (1749-1832) was outside the historical span of the Romantic Age. W.B.

2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 2.
Yeats (1865-1939), with his Celtic ideology, is another such example.

The Romantic Age in English literature also did not emerge by showing any precise temporal demarcation from its preceding age. On the other hand, it showed itself as a full-fledged artistic trend only after coming through a sufficient course of evolution in the realm of thought.

Romanticism is said to have emerged as a protest against the dry rationality of the eighteenth century. The gestation of reactionary feelings against the eighteenth century rationality was to be felt in this century itself and it is this century that had produced the poets of the Graveyard genre like Thomas Parnell (1679-1718), Edward Young (1683-1765), Robert Blair (1699-1746), and Thomas Gray. Young heralded the faith in the reverence of the self. Symptoms of the change showed themselves most clearly during the last thirty years of that century. They seem to have provided the psychological setting for the upheaval of thought in the form of Romanticism in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the history of literature, these years reveal themselves separately by forming an important stage in the course of transition from Classicism to Romanticism. Louis Cazamian has marked the duration of this stage from 1770 to 1798 and also grouped these years under the title "The pre-Romantic Period". M.H. Abrams has termed

5. Louis Cazamian: A History of English Literature (1930)
this period the "Age of Sensibility". Still showing themselves as a continuation of the preceding years, these years developed some traits which foreshadowed the coming of a new era with a moral and literary change. In spite of their somewhat mixed character, the psychological elements which were going to shape another age in literature, were more conspicuous than ever. Yet a strong romantic sensibility can be traced farther back to this specified period. Joseph Warton's poem 'The Enthusiast' composed in 1740 "is the earliest expression of complete revolt against the classical attitude which had been sovereign in all European literature for nearly a century."  

Romanticism in general is not a body of the ideas and opinions of any group or organization of literary men of a particular period. It is rather the expression of a particular mood or temperament through art and literature. Literary history testifies the never-ending conflict between the two mental trends. One is susceptible to the existing conditions and is ready to accept the existing values and work upon them; the other may be called reactionary. 

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9. Ibid., p. 5.
its love of uniformity and balance, the former represents the Classical trend while the latter, with its yearning for ever exploring the unknown, unseen, and even at times the seemingly non-existent, defying the existing values, its love of the wonderful, indulgence in exuberance and emotion, represents the Romantic trend.

Love of the wonderful, of beauty, and yearning for and appreciation of the mystery of creation characterized the works of Shakespeare, Marlowe and Spenser. Taking their time as the first Romantic period, the awakening of similar sensibilities that began to pervade the literary minds towards the end of the eighteenth century, is called the revival of the earlier Romantic period or the neo-Romantic period. An obvious difference between the two periods is that the Elizabethan Romanticism had flourished mainly in the form of drama whereas neo-Romanticism flourished mainly in the form of poetry.

The difference between Classicism and Romanticism does not lie basically in the choice of subject-matter; the same object or experience may be the theme of both. The difference is in the treatment of the theme. The Classicists emphasized generalization and abstraction whereas the Romantics are known for their love of particulars and details. For Blake, "To particularize is the only merit".  

The Romanticists emphasized introspection. Arthur O. Lovejoy has referred to the preoccupation of Romanticism "with 'The heart' as distinguished from the outward act, its tendency to introspection" denoting "for its peculiar province, the inexhaustible realm of the inner life of man."\(^1\) Coleridge also said in his 'Dejection: an Ode':

I may not hope from outward forms to win

The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

Their concentration was engaged in the inner experience at times with the indifference to the external experiences. Classical literature was restrained, sophisticated and impersonal while dependence on excessive imagination is one of the unfailing characteristics of all the Romantic poets. The eighteenth century literature was the literature of the head. The heart had little to do with it. It explains the flourishing of prose literature during that period.\(^2\)

The "pre-Romantic Period" or the "Age of Sensibility" seems to have served as a bridge linking the two opposing ages. During this period, the world of art and literature began to be stirred by an awakening of imagination more than ever. The mental faculty, with a strengthened desire to feel, learnt to receive stimuli from which it could evoke images according to its capacity. The

\(^{11}\) Arthur O. Lovejoy: op. cit., p. 18.
\(^{12}\) Mahendra Bora: op. cit., p. 9.
enlivened sensibility, with an unwonted pleasure, began to look for its objects beyond its own surroundings as well. The distant places, coloured with imagination, the past, enlivened with emotion, and all that is exotic in nature started drawing people's sympathy by their attractiveness. Imagination is never satisfied with the accessible. It always conceives as ideal whatever colours or transcends present reality. Thus the past, with its vagueness and remoteness, conjured up all possible colours and thus retrospection came to be one of the essential features of pre-Romantic evocation. Arthur O. Lovejoy, in his analysis of Romanticism, has referred to Professor Ker's interpretation of "romantic" as "reminiscence" and Mr. Geoffry Scott's interpretation of "its most typical form" as "the cult of the extinct". Rational lucidity of the eighteenth century had lost its charm long before and the renaissance of feeling craved for nothing less than an antithesis between the time it had experienced and the time it wanted to experience.

Though discredited with the unattractiveness of dry rationality, the eighteenth century was the most prolific of all ages in English literature. England had enriched her literature, from the early period of its development, through the exchanges of ideas with Italy and France. But

England's necessity of borrowing from Italy had ended with the Renaissance and Germany had begun to impart her ideas rather late. It was with France that England had continued any exchange of ideas since the Restoration of 1660. Upto the beginning of the eighteenth century, England was mostly borrowing ideas from France including the doctrine of neo-Classicism. But during the eighteenth century, England began to flourish with ideas of her own and started showing marvellous improvement on whatever she borrowed. Night Thoughts of Young, Seasons of Thomson, Ossian of Macpherson, the melancholy poems of Gray and the sentimental poems of Collins aroused a craze for England all over Europe. Towards the close of the century, France began to produce thinkers rich with the ideas of the English philosophers. The culmination was reached in the master brain of Jean-Jacques Rousseau whose ideas agitated people's thought so much that it burst forth in no less a movement than the French Revolution of 1789. The eighteenth century English thought, already on the verge of dissolution, was extremely agitated and for a balance, had, of necessity, to resort to a new and liberal outlook which came to be known as Romanticism. A new doctrine needs much daring to emerge as the antithesis of the established one. Neo-Romanticism felt an ally in the French Revolution and made its way.

Thus Romanticism, though basically a literary movement, was inspired by factors quite outside literature
and art. The Revolution cast a three-fold influence upon the English Romantic poets—its emotional aspect inspired Wordsworth and Coleridge; Shelley was inspired by the intellectual aspect behind it; whereas on Byron the appeal was of the political aspect. Shelley's lines—

The nations thronged around, and cried aloud,
As with one voice, truth, liberty, love!

Prometheus Unbound

seem to echo the voice of the great Revolution. Wordsworth expressed his reaction to the Revolution at its commencement as—

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive.

'French Revolution'

After the Revolution, France began to exert influence on England, exercising with equal strength, the contrary feelings of attraction and repulsion and a continuous struggle between the two aroused a keen consciousness of the self. Conflicting attitudes towards the Revolution sharpened the sense of energy, of instinct and of individual temperament and from about 1800 assimilated themselves with Romanticism, thus lending it a mixed character.

To make the story of nineteenth-century culture start in the year of the French Revolution is at once convenient and accurate, even though nothing in history "starts" at a precise moment. For although the revolution itself had its beginnings
in ideas and conditions preceding the date, it is clear that the events of 1789 brought together and crystalized a multitude of hopes, fears, and desponds into something visible, potent and irreversible. 14

It is true that before emerging in its concrete form in 1789, the Revolution itself had to pass through the tests of ideas and conditions. But once it was able to prove that it could give shape to the long anticipated feelings of the people, it threw all other events into insignificance.

However much the English thinkers might be swayed by the ideals of the French Revolution, they could not approve of the way of the French Republic that followed it; and seemingly they turned their faces from France.

France by 1789 had been for more than a century the cultural dictator of Europe, and it is clear that in England and Germany the search for native sources of art was stimulated by the desire to break the tyranny of the French language and literature. 15

This led to a sense of patriotism and also a renewed love and reverence for Shakespeare. But French influence on English thinking was too deep and too extended to effect an abrupt break. Hence a peculiar attachment still continued between them.

15. Ibid., p. 785.
From about the time the English thinkers began to express their disliking of the French Revolution, they also began to show their hatred for Napoleon and his autocratic activities. Still, for all their hatred, some of the significant traits in Napoleon's character attracted them and derived their appraisal no less.

Conflicts and contradictions of opinions in each age prove that unity of an age does not necessarily depend on common opinions and common traits. Otherwise, with their so-called combats with the Romantic philosophers, William James and Nitzsche could not have been said to inherit Byron, Carlyle and Goethe; the liberal Byron and the conservative Sir Walter Scott could not have been credited with same romantic inspiration. Thus it is not the philosophy of the individuals but the political, social, psychological and spiritual setting that is responsible for the unity among men of an age with diverse opinions; and these are the elements that differentiate one age from another. Society is the need of mass psychology which, in turn, is controlled by political events. In this sense social elements include psychological and spiritual elements as well. Though critics generally treat Romanticism as an aesthetic trend and not as a political one, its political background demands no less attention than the other one. Influenced by all these conditions, the publication in 1798,
of *Lyrical Ballads*, the joint work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, completed the transition from Classicism to Romanticism.

**Individualism:**

In the growth of Romanticism, the political and social elements made greatness of the self and exaggeration of individualism most prominent. "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" was the slogan of the Revolution which demanded the recognition of individual rights and the sovereignty of the people. Individual rights is the "political axiom of revolutionary thought"\(^\text{16}\) which was extended to the cultural sphere in the form of individualism "asserting that every human being is an object of interest in himself, an end in himself. What is more, the truly valuable part of each individual is his uniqueness, which is entitled to thrive and develop free of oppression."\(^\text{17}\) However much Christian theology might idolize the human soul, man himself, as he is, had never received his proper recognition. He was able to strip off from abstraction only with the help of liberty that the Romantic awakening had conferred upon him.

The Romanticists' glorification of individualism explains the paradox of their attraction for and appreciation of Napoleon. "Napoleon was regarded as the model of a new man,\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., p. 786.\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., p. 786.
even during his life, because his career was manifestly the product of his own thought and will working against the greatest imaginable resistance. He typified the individual challenging the world and subduing it by his genius." In Napoleon's miraculous power of translating his visions into reality they discovered the affinity of their creative imagination. Napoleon, for them, represented the greatness of the self's ability. Napoleonic battles and the French Revolution caused such a political overturn that in the realm of art and literature, it became necessary to create something new. As such the Romanticists' break with the earlier century was not willing but forced.

Again, confusion arises if we assume Romanticism as only a political issue. Because we come across interpretation of Romanticism in politics as exaggeration of individualism which often results in supreme power entrusted to individuals resulting in dictatorship and tyranny. It is often accused of even being the origin of German and Italian Fascism, and at times of Russian communism. Thus danger to itself was thought to loom in the actions of Mussolini. And it is hard to deny this charge when we consider the political outcomes of Romanticism as isolated issues. It often ended in populism instead of democracy, risking, at times, its own existence. But Romantic ideals, in the

18. Ibid., p. 787.
spheres of culture and literature, are found to enable the individual to acquire the capacity of exploring the unknown and encourage the sovereignty of the people resulted from the love of liberty.

When we consider historical Romanticism, we see that it reached its culmination through the effort of a similar-minded, if not single-minded, group. So in the exaggeration of individualism, we do not see the rejection of the collectivized sentiment. Things seem to be unwisely generalized when one goes so far as to say that Byron's passionate inspiring of the wild forces of nature as the sources of energy was akin to lawless despotism. The glorification of the worth and power of the individual man does not imply any approval of his disintegrating force. In their pursuit of mysteries, the Romanticists did not only appeal to the logical mind but took the whole range of intellectual faculties, senses and emotions into consideration. This required individual experience; and in this sense, they were individualists.

Humanism:

As has already been said, the Classical literature of the eighteenth century was the literature of the Intellect and Reason with its abstract love of humanity. The Romantic period began to attach value to sensation and
emotion and study "man as he is actually found — diverse, mysterious, and irregular, which is to say, in the form of particular men and peoples." Man, with all his contradictions, came to be treated with equal consideration of "the contrast between man's greatness and man's wretchedness; man's power and man's misery." 

It was Pascal, the seventeenth century thinker, who first perceived this contradiction in human nature. His *Thoughts* showed the distinction between reason and intuition. He received his proper recognition only in the first half of the nineteenth century. A Romanticist's "vision is always focused on man — on the fundamentals of man's nature, on those problems and those aspects of his character which apply to any age and any country." 

Imagination:

An attempt at analysing the prominent characteristics sanctioned by most of the studies on Romanticism, brings to our immediate view the earliest and the most important of them — the awakening of imagination. "It was by means of the imagination that the Romantic poets explored
the mysterious labyrinths of the universe. As the primary creative faculty, imagination was invested with an extraordinary range and depth of power."22

The "corporeal or the vegetative eye", to use Blake's term, was rejuvenated with such vitality that it was not a strain for them to perceive the immanent spirit behind all physical existence. Coleridge, in his Dejection ode, called imagination the "shaping spirit". It is also the "repetition, in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation."23 For Shelley "the great instrument of moral good is the imagination."24 For the Romanticists "poetry is imaginative passion."25

However much imagination was regarded as great, its object was not to reject the validity of the external world. It was only to assert that the individual mind can and does act in a perfect way quite independently. The Romanticists' doctrine of duality is the product of this belief in the validity of both the external world and the human mind,

endowed as it is, with miraculous power. External phenomena are not obliterated but just shadowed by imagination. Anything shadowy like the past, the far-off countries, the mythological realm, demands exercise of imagination and as such appealed to the Romanticists.

Blake believed that God operates in the human soul, and imagination, being a faculty of the soul, can be nothing less than God. His faith in the creative power of imagination is expressed in his lines —

I must create a system or be enslaved by another Man's,
I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create.

Such beliefs were shared, to a very great extent, by Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats also. Innovation and imagination being interdependent, the Romanticists advocated innovation as against the Classicists' love of the tradition.

The attitude of the English Romanticists towards imagination was quite different from that of their German contemporaries. While the German Romanticists believed imagination to be means of keeping themselves detached from life and thereby relished a nihilistic delight, the English Romanticists believed that imagination should have its base on truth and reality. Being endowed with a special insight or intuition, imagination can penetrate into regions
which are beyond the reach of ordinary intelligence. In fact, the Romanticists believed that imagination and intuition inspire each other; and it is through their collaboration that they could explore the mysterious regions of the spirit. The exquisite imaginative power also enabled the Romantic poets to overcome any barrier of time. "The extremes that meet in Coleridge's poetry are extremes of past and present. His most characteristic contribution to our knowledge of literature lies directly here, in his grasp of the paradox of a present: past."26 In relation to Coleridge's theory of imagination, M.H. Abrams has referred to the "superlative evaluation of the function and status of this faculty."27 "Vision or imagination is a presentation of what Eternally Exists."28

To draw a distinction between imagination and fancy is a common practice. For Coleridge Fancy is "the aggregating Faculty of the mind" and Imagination is "the modifying, and 'coadunating' Faculty."29 Referring to Coleridge and Leigh Hunt's attempt at distinguishing these

two faculties, M.H. Abrams has said, "Not infrequently, we also hear echoes of Coleridge's antithesis between fancy and imagination, but the distinction is usually desultory and tends to collapse entirely, because unsupported by the firm understructure of Coleridge's philosophical principles."\(^\text{30}\)

And also "In Hunt's introductory essay, the difference between these faculties resolves into a difference between levity and gravity in the poets attitude."\(^\text{31}\) Thus fancy may be said to command attention more than often as a mode of imagination.

Because Romanticism is supposed to emerge as an antithesis of Classicism, the doctrine that attached utmost supremacy to reason, it is often accused of irrationalism. But the supremacy of imagination does not exclude the presence of reason. The works of Nietzsche, William James, Bergson and Freud refute the charge of irrationalism. The works of these great thinkers show a rare maintenance of order and form and supreme concentration of thought. Abstract reason does not always work. Too much exercise of reason leads to the repression of impulses and the repression, by nature, generates a force. Because this repression is felt by people only individually, it is the individual that must tackle the force. Ultimately abstract reason fails to prove against its futility, and this force,

\(^{30}\) M.H. Abrams: op. cit., p. 179.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., p. 182.
no less than the life force itself, is termed irrational. Ayn Rand has refuted the charge of irrationality by saying that Romanticism is necessarily based on Volition premise. The faculty of reason is the faculty of volition and it is the want of this knowledge that leads to the belief that volition is antirational and thereby necessarily associated with mysticism. Despite the indulgence and excess of feeling and emotion, a rare sense of harmony pervades the atmosphere of Romantic poetry.

Faith and Hope:

The Romantic poets are often accused of restlessness. But the tranquility in poets like Wordsworth tell a quite different tale. Sporadic study of poets like Shelley and Swinburne leads to the belief that Romantic poets are convention-breakers. Nevertheless, the never-ending course of tradition has been possible only because a fraction of each generation approves and carries over at least a few of the characteristics of the preceding generation. Coming through much trial, the Romanticists came to know that some common understanding among men was necessary to hold the society together and forms and conventions were the names of this understanding. They only

32. Ayn Rand: op. cit., p. 64.
33. Ibid., p. 70.
rearranged the order of the conventions and discarded those that would not suit them. "They praised originality but they did not talk each in his own private language." The Herculean task of tackling the force that time had imposed upon them may account for the restlessness in some of them; but faith and hope, the other two romantic traits, contradict restlessness.

Synthesis and contradiction form the very texture of Romanticism. The basis of faith and hope in the Romantic poets is their yearning for knowing the unknown, for exploring the universe, or in a sense, for reconciling themselves to the universe. The essence of the universe is novelty and novelty is always subject to change. Reason, with its unchanging nature, cannot be expected to be of use in understanding it. Imagination, with its ever-expanding nature, can help in perceiving and even in creating those changes, those novelties of the universe. But uncertainty of success is the main drawback of imagination; and this the Romanticists had to make up with faith. Hope, being one of the components of faith, is inevitably associated with it.

Love of Force:

The Romantic poets pleaded for the greatness of force. But force in itself was not the object of their desire. There was the example of Napoleon before them to teach them enough about the futility of force as it is. But they also learnt from the example of Napoleon that force, united with heroism and proper leadership, could accomplish marvels.

The critical philosophers of the eighteenth century had destroyed their own dwelling place. The new generation must build or perish. Whence we conclude that Romanticism is first of all constructive and creative; it is what may be called a solving epoch, as against the dissolving eighteenth century.  \[35\]

The necessity of reconstruction was felt more or less by most of the thinkers of the Romantic period though they offered and followed their own and different ways according to their own temperaments. Thus Wordsworth, Victor Hugo, Schopenhaur, Burke and Hegel worked in quite different spheres while seeking for innovation. But still they showed a common admiration for energy, moral enthusiasm and original genius. Goethe's Faust stands as the ideal example of the Romanticists' yearning for the dynamic energies. His endless strivings as well as his failure reflect the Romantic mood.

It is only natural that each period should face the problem of reconstruction more or less. The cultural differences that mark each period is due to the difference of the ways of looking into their problems; and these differences are settled by the parallel differences in their political conditions.

Return to the Middle Ages:

As to the eager return of the Romanticists to the Middle Ages, this much can be said that their recourse to this so far neglected age was the result of the unlimited upsurge of imagination. Rejuvenated imagination rendered the romantic minds capable of creating and transforming their objects; and when the collective memory of the people began to conceive the Middle Ages as an age of strong appeal with its picturesque quality, its faith and its simplicity, the Romanticists accepted it as the object of their desire. The century-long suppression of emotion found an outlet in its new interest in sentimental stories, in natural scenery, in popular ballads and in the tales of horror and mystery. The exuberance of these appealed to them against the routine-bound regularity of the Classical literature. The far away and the incomprehensible had an unfailling appeal to the romantic sensibility. The sense of inaccessibility that the old romances, with their thrilling tales incited, inspired their imagination. Remoteness lent an exotic charm
of its own. The naming of the nineteenth century Romanticism owed to the keen interest in the medieval romance shown by writers like Walter Scott and Keats. Reminiscence of childhood in many Romantic poets has its source in their love of the past.

The Romanticists cannot be said to have shown much respect for historical precision in their love of the Middle Ages. Abundance of emotion coloured everything as to obliterates more often the sign of difference between the real and the unreal. In fact, they began to comprehend the Middle Ages as they desired them to be, not as they really were. They conferred all the favourable traits of English Renaissance upon the Middle Ages and thus creating their most desired antithesis between the Classical age and the age they liked to resort to, they began to treat both the ages with equal respect. The popular mind began to feel a peculiar kind of familiarity with the Middle Ages and conjured up a sense of possibility of its asserting itself once again. This feeling evoked and extended the range of their sympathy. The national spirit experienced within itself a mysterious revival of the past and began to feel such a kinship with it as if it were its former self resurrected after centuries of oblivion.

The Romanticists were nationalists; but theirs was a cultural nationalism. It was their cultural past that had
drawn their curiosity. Love for and exploration of their past became thus the two vital tendencies of them.

**Diversity:**

Diversity seems to be the very essence of Romanticism when we consider the Romanticists' reaction against the sense of repose and serenity of the Classicists. Lilian R. Furst has, in this context, referred to Morse Peckham's definition of Romanticism:

> Whether philosophic, theologic or aesthetic, it is the revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organism. Its values are change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious.  

Arthur O. Lovejoy, also has referred to the "amazing diversity" attained by the word "romantic".

The Romanticists risked the basic values of life in their glorification of the individual's changing and fallible judgements. With a revived sense of self-consciousness, they discovered injustice and oppression in the existing order; and to fight them, they had to evoke and exercise energy and effort. In doing so, the Romanticists proved themselves to be potential anarchists;  

and their refusal of the established order characterized the creations with diversity. The sense of social oppression turned some of them into pessimists — while in others it aroused a keen sense of strife and strong optimism.

Religious Revival:

Among all the diversities that the Romanticists sanctioned, they had to find unity for their own reconciliation to the universe. In doing so they resorted to a power vast and potent enough to provide them with a solution. This accounts for the religious aspect of Romanticism and also shows that religion was a psychological necessity for them.

The earlier religious revival in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the form of Puritanism manifested itself as a creed antagonistic to art and literature. The period of transition, through John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, brought about a radical change in the sphere of religion by attaching great importance and effectiveness to the faculty of intuition. Intuition operates itself in a mysterious way; and thus mystical imagination came to be the instrument of religion. The newly awakened interest in nature was equally responsible for this religious revival. Seeing life throbbing all through nature, they looked for the power that worked behind its animation. Thus religion
for them became an intellectual and emotional necessity rather than the logical outcome of the deduction of the cause and effect relation. Religion was a feeling of reverence toward the unfailing energy that works in a mysterious way. They felt this energy everywhere in action and thus their religion manifested itself mostly in the form of pantheism.

The Romanticists could not forget the individual, and even if they had many allies in the external world, each of them was alone to solve his curiosities and their religion remained personal.

Love of Nature:

The Romanticists interpreted the meaning and significance of "Nature" in a completely different manner from the Classicists. Rousseau's call for back to Nature had whetted the already rebellious tendencies against the eighteenth century artificiality; and Romanticism in France, during the early years of the nineteenth century had shaped itself according to this call. The Romanticists loved nature in both the senses - in the sense of innate and spontaneous ideas and in the sense of those that do not need human assistance and contrivance to grow and develop. Through nature "they found those exalting moments when they passed from sight to vision and pierced, as they thought, to the
secrets of the universe." 

Love of nature is a common characteristic of almost all the Romantic poets; yet it reached its culmination in Wordsworth. For him self-consciousness is incomplete without nature-consciousness. He was occupied chiefly with rural nature and believed that nature with "the abiding presence of mountain, lake and field under the influence of the changing seasons - is a haunted house through which we must pass before our spirit can be independent." 

It was Romantic poetry that had made man familiar with different facets of nature. The sublime manifestation of nature led to the mystic experiences of the Romantic poets. Their love of beauty is only another aspect of their love of nature. Even with Shelley, the revolutionary, "the contemplation of beauty is... the first stage in the progress toward reasoned virtue." 

Reality:

The Romanticists are often termed feeble spirits and are accused of trying to escape from realities. Imagination.


is generally believed to have no relation with real life and its exercise is believed to lead into escapism. But the fact was that their sense of necessity of innovation demanded that they should rearrange the order of reality or lay aside a portion of it. Jacques Barzun has offered a very effective analogy of the Romanticists' position with that of a primitive man who has, for the first time, the idea of heading toward a cave to protect himself from the furious rage of a hailstorm. This shows his sense of facing reality rather than his urge to escape, as is generally explained.

Classicism was eaten up by excessive abstraction and generalization. Quite in contradiction to these self-destroying elements, the Romanticists based their untiring efforts on the exploration of reality. They believed that to have significance everything must appear in a particular form. It has already been said that the Romanticists created out of necessity. Hence, the world they created, though invested with imagination, had to be real to be able to shelter them. Repetition and refinement had left nothing for the Romanticists to serve as a model. Feeling themselves in a void, they had no choice but to take the whole world for their substance. Only they viewed the world as a varied one and admitted reality to be both external and internal.

internal. They granted a vast range to reality admitting not only the substantial, but also the world of dream; not only the unknown possibilities of nature but also the supernatural; and they craved for exactitude in all of them. They also could enliven everything with their vivid description. Though mostly occupied with supernatural and transcendental subjects, "reading the poems of Coleridge is like watching poetry happen." 42

It was their sense of reality that had urged them to discard the forms with their contents rotten and lost. Thus whatever is meant by "romantic revolt" has its root in the longing for reality; and when Jacques Barzun says that Romanticism is Realism they only confront a fact reinforced. This straying from the established order accounts for their being called "exotic". "Of all his contemporaries, Coleridge was the most concerned with the problem of how the poetic mind acts to modify or transform the materials of sense without violating truth to nature." 44 So even Coleridge, who was more concerned with the supernatural than with the natural, emphasized reality. In Wordsworth also, "love and imagination and reason all coalesce in the appreciation of reality." 45

42. George Watson: op.cit., p. 6.
Imagination,... in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

The Prelude.XIV

Most of the Romanticists cherished passionate regard for reality — physical and mental. They have proved themselves to be most persistent followers of facts leaving in their creations records of detailed observation. Wordsworth, Hazlitt, Goethe, Victor Hugo and Stendhal were as minute and as comprehensive as any scientist. Their pursuit of truth was of the same nature as that of the scientists; only they worked in a different process. While science proceeds by specialization and exclusion, they proceeded with inclusion allowing a vast range to everything they worked upon. They were adverse not to science, but to materialism.

Contradistinction of Poetry and Science:

Yet there is a popular charge against Romanticism of opposition to science. "We murder to dissect" (The Tables Turned) and "peep and botanize upon his mother's grave" (The Poet's Epitaph)— these two lines of Wordsworth seem to confirm the charge. But this seems to be an unwise generalization resulting from the later specialization in the different branches of science. The accusing lines of
Keats in *Lamia* seem no less responsible for this charge:

Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine —
Unweave a rainbow...

"Keats was one among the lovers of poetry to whom it seemed that matter of fact or science is not only the opposite but the enemy of poetry, in a war in which the victory, even the survival, of poetry is far from certain." But then "Keats's utterances on poetry are written with the unphilosophical informality and the volatility of mood proper to the personal letter; it is difficult to interpret many of them, and perilous to take any one as his ultimate judgement." But in Shelley this sense of contradistinction between imagination and matter of fact or poetry and science seems to dissolve. In his 'Ode to the West Wind,' there are most exquisitely impassioned expression of facts established by science. Wordsworth, whose poetry combined "profound truth of subject with profound truth of execution", cannot possibly be accused of aversion to science.

Expanse of range accounts equally for their taking supernatural, religious and psychological matters as truths.

47. Ibid., p. 303.
The demonology of Goethe and Scott, the opium dreams of De Quincey and Coleridge, the visions of Blake and Hoffmann, the divine revelations of Shelley and Victor Hugo were realities in this light. They had, in fact, experienced them individually. While introducing the supernatural, Coleridge pleaded "willing suspension of disbelief" which is equally essential to both scientific and artistic work. As the reality that the Romanticists craved for, was inclusive in nature, Romanticism did not end in types.

Intuition:

Romantic perception is based on intuition. The Romanticists worked in an open universe as against the Classicists' geometrical limitations. The very vastness of their scope bound them to imperfections. The nature of intuition is subject to change from man to man. Reason and geometry can ask for exactitude whereas intuition can ask only for possibilities. Thus the Romanticists had to and could work in a vast expansion of possibilities, certain and uncertain. Art is the product of a man's subconscious integrations, of his sense of life, to a large extent than of his conscious philosophical convictions.

Subjectivism:

Romanticism is subjective in nature. Fichte's creed of subjectivism was responsible for the supreme power that
imagination had acquired. For the Romanticists, the external world was the projection of the imaginative perception—subjective in nature and transformed.

Subjectivism in Romanticism is often misinterpreted. At times it stands for a lack of realism while on others, it signifies adoration of the ego. Both the interpretations seem to imply irresponsibility. On the other hand, the term "objectivism" is credited with the quality of being real or true. But here again, the meaning is felt to be confused. Sameness of experience in different subjects is often taken to be objective. The exact word for such experience, according to Jacques Barzun, is "inter-subjective". 49

Subjectivism was not a condition, but a necessity for the Romanticists. Finding that the old inter-subjective formulas did not work, they had to base their creations on individual experiences.

Love of Freedom:

Another established fact about Romantic poetry is love of freedom. Rousseau believed that love of freedom is intrinsic in man and it endows him with a new vision of life and liberty. He also showed that stagnation of the society is against the life force. He is called a revolutionary because of his protestations against such a condition. Love

of freedom is inherent in Romanticism.

Romantic literature did not come into existence until the nineteenth century, when men's life was politically freer than in any other period of history and when Western culture was still reflecting a predominantly Aristotelian influence—the conviction that man's mind is competent to deal with reality.  

As usual, the Romanticists attributed a very expansive range of connotation to the term "freedom". Including material, emotional and spiritual freedom, it extended its influence to the form and subject matter of poetry. The minutest object was treated with greatest importance and spontaneity of expression was preferred overcoming the barrier of metre. They expanded the range of poetic diction and substituted all words for only "noble" words. They added the Celtic and Germanic to the Graeco-Roman mythology. For setting, they chose "local colour" instead of the uniform Classical tragedy. History was their prime avocation in rediscovering the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century. Refusing to confine their cultural arena within London and Paris, they explored the cultures of distant places like America and the Orient. Against the sophisticated limitations, they hunted the fields of folk-literature and folk-music and made allowance for every class and condition of people to provide them

subject matters. Wordsworth, in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* has referred to his inclusion of the emotion of common men. Use of the folk style and interest in the supernatural are represented in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*.

Contradictions:

Simultaneous existence of contradictory and conflicting ideas and feelings is common in Romantic poetry; and one of the best examples of this is Goethe's much celebrated line from *Faust*: "Oh! What delight! What woe!"

"... for the romantic there is always the element of conflict... and since he is asking questions to which there is no answer he is little likely to reach a serene conclusion." One of the paradoxical questions about Romanticism arises from its being lyrical and dramatic in nature at the same time. But here again the Romanticists' great ability and vast expanse of interest may be brought into account for help. With their rare imaginative power and equally rare creative impulse, "they shaped fleeting visions into concrete forms and pursued wild thoughts until they captured and mastered them." The conflicting essences and

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contrasting figures of their works involved drama. In fact, strife, antithesis, contrasts, oppositions and colour are the essence of Romanticism. Their use of lyric moderated the conflicts showing marvels as its result.

Faithfulness in receiving impressions often led to contradictions. The Romanticists succeeded in their peculiar arrangements of the grotesque by the side of the sublime and the trivial by the mystic. It was possible for them because of their liberality in inclusion of different ideas into their dominant ones; and this is the reason behind the fact that Goethe's Romanticism is naturalistic, Noval's and Carlyle's Romanticism is idealistic, Blake's is mystic, Burke's and Scott's, conservative and that of Byron and Hazlitt liberalistic. The works of the Russian novelist Gogol manifest with equal force the two trends of Romanticism and Realism. The fact that Romanticism is a harmonization of many moods and tendencies, accounts for this. Their rejection of abstraction enabled them to use their senses freely and conceive ideas about the nature of things without conventional bias. Theirs was a multiverse rather than a universe.54

An estimate of Romanticism as pure sentimentality is very common. The word "sentimentality" cannot be interpreted as just the display or possession of feeling, either moderate or excessive. Because there is no line of demarcation as to the righteousness of its amount. It is a mental state in which one cultivates feelings but cannot transform them into action. This charge of sentimentality does not seem to work when one remembers the French Revolution. The French Revolution is the best instance of executing feelings into action. "Unlike the sentimentalist who has a compartmental existence, the romantic realist does not blink his weakness, but exerts his power." Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) is one of the pioneers of this so-called sentimentalism of Romanticism.

The Romanticists are often accused as escapists. Yet they showed tremendous power of activity during short spans of life and unprecedented love for life. Byron shared Rousseau's belief that the goal of life is not happiness but action. Blake and Coleridge were opposed to the Tabula Rasa theory propounded by Locke which defined the mind in perception "as a passive receiver for images presented ready-formed from without." W.B. Yeats also held a strong view against the idea of escapism in art. "So certain was he that art was not 'escape' \[55\] Ibid., p. 77.
\[56\] M.H. Abrams : op.cit., p. 57.
that he thought of the situation the other way round: art was what you tried to escape from."

Most of the prominent Romanticists of the younger group died before the age of forty; and yet these so-called "love-lorn egotists" left such talented production in profusion as to speak for their eagerness to translate feelings into action. It was their repulsion of and reaction to the state of things that made them defiant and assertive. For such reactions of theirs, they were accused occasionally as egotists and misanthropists. Their intentions transcended their selves by acting themselves in the political, social and aesthetic fields.

The Romanticists are also often said to be emotional beings. But, like sentimentality, indulgence of emotion also should be considered not as characteristic of Romanticism but as an isolated individual trait. Individual temperament and mood are also responsible for the unequal exercise of the prominent characteristics of any trend.

A new element that the Romanticists had brought into art was the primacy of values. "Values (and value judgements) are the source of emotions; a great deal of emotional intensity was projected in the works of the Romanticists and in the reactions of their audiences, as well as a great deal of colour, imagination, originality, excitement and all the

other consequences of a value oriented view of life."\textsuperscript{58}

\textbf{Idealism:}

Hegel and Schopenhaur, the German idealists and Kant's disciples, believed in the distinction between the thinking subject and the perceived object. "Idea" and "thing" are distinct; but idea or the mind shapes the realities of things. Fichte modified Kant into the belief that the ego is the creator of the world. This seems a generalization or an extension of individualism into the extreme possibility. In their conviction that reality is essentially spiritual, the Romanticists only illustrated Hegel's doctrine that nothing is real but spirit.

Emphasis and selection being inevitable for every art, all art must have some sort of idealization. Approximating a common norm was the Classical idealization. Romantic idealization acted in quite an opposite direction. It craved for the exact expressiveness of each particular. Wordsworth's poetry abound in such yearning for exactitude.

In contradiction to Naturalism, Romanticism recognizes the existence of man's volition. Science explains what the sensible world is; but to measure its worth, we must exert mental judgements. To assert validity of anything, we must grant validity to mental processes.

\textsuperscript{58} Ayn Rand: \textit{op.cit.}, p. 70.
Aristotle recognized the validity of the power of the human mind and had influenced the Romantic thinkers. But by the nineteenth century, his influence could not be felt so much in theory as it could be in practice. Since the Renaissance, the craze was for Plato's mysticism.

Pessimism:

Romantic literature is often accused as pessimistic. Wordsworth has defined a poet as a man "who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them." This does not certainly conjure up any pessimistic image. Passion and imagination are associated with the mental vitality and love of life and the world. Desire to see a happier world is at the root of Romantic imagination. This desire is reflected in O. Henry's projection of life in his short stories in a benevolent and childlike spirit. Keen observation of the minutest objects in most of the Romantic poets is effected by the delight they take in them. Romanticism started as a violent, passionate torrent of righteous self-assertiveness in defiance of primordial evils. A naive innocence and optimistic benevolence run through the Romantic works.

Jacques Barzun, in his *Classic, Romantic and Modern*, has summed up most of the characteristics that are believed to be the components of Romanticism, in a seemingly negative sentence:

Romanticism is not a return to the Middle Ages, a love of the exotic, a revolt from reason, an exaggeration of individualism, a liberation of the unconscious, a reaction against scientific method, a revival of pantheism, idealism and Catholicism, a rejection of artistic conventions, a preference for emotion, a movement back to nature, or a glorification of force.  

The negative form does not signify here any intention of refutation concerning the presence of the traits; it simply points out the lack of the uniformity of distribution of these traits in the literary creations of the prominent Romanticists.

Considering historical Romanticism, we see two trends, one of which is occupied with the natural and the other with the transcendental. Simplicity, primitivism and naturalness formed the former trend. Simplicity was often swayed so far as to manifest itself in a wild form and naturalness was misinterpreted being twisted by excessive imagination. Wordsworth, Crabbe, Clare, and at times, Keats expressed their feelings in this strain.

Another group of romantic writers preferred diversity and complexity in the form of conscious art permitting the mind the capability of conceiving things beyond the physical range. This transcendental strain of Romanticism found its outlet through the works of the writers of whom the most prominent are Blake, Coleridge and Shelley.

Now, the growing tendency to label poets like T.S. Eliot, Hart Crane, Allen Tate, Whitman and Wallace Stevens as romantic seems difficult to explain either in the light of perennial Romanticism or in that of historical Romanticism. It is here that we have to look for its another complicated direction which has been termed aesthetic. Though treated separately, this course of Romanticism derived its inspiration from those two more neatly explainable trends -- the natural and the transcendental.

Without any risk to adequacy, aesthetic Romanticism can be treated as the expansion which the plasticity attached to the trait of diversity of Romanticism afforded. With the vastness of its scope, it ultimately came to represent the trend opposing realistic imitation. The importance attached to subjective imagination naturally brought about some changes in the field of art and literature and these changes manifested themselves in the form of aesthetic Romanticism.
The wave of the Romantic spirit that had attained the pinnacle of its glory in England in the early period of the nineteenth century was ushered into India with the spread of English. Bengal, being one of the earliest seats of English education, heralded the introduction of this new trend. Due to the late annexation of Assam into the British rule, it was only in the last decade of the nineteenth century — almost a century later, that the Romantic ideal, in its true spirit, became conspicuous in Assamese poetry.