

	Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra	
Module: Literature (British)	Faculty of Letters and Languages	Level: Third Year (L 3)
Lecturer: Mr A. Boulegroune	Department of English	Semester: One

BRITISH PRE-ROMANTIC POETS

Introduction

Pre-Romanticism was a cultural movement in Europe from about the 1740s onward that preceded and presaged the artistic movement known as Romanticism. Pre-Romanticism was also regarded as the Age of Sensibility. Sensibility came to supersede reason as the touchstone of life. The noticeable tendency was for the sensitive heart to contemplate it. The Pre-Romantics developed interest in “nature” and in simple primitive society. The French Philosopher Rousseau’s (1712-78) remedy for the decadence resulting from civilization was the famous “return to nature”. Robert Burns, Thomas Gray, and William Blake and are the most representative of the pre-Romantic poets.

1. Pre-Romantic Representative Poets

a) Robert Burns (1759-1796)

He was endowed with a marvellously spontaneous power of genius and unrivalled gift of song. It is a mistake to regard him as an unlettered ploughman. “The Cotter's Saturday Night” is an unaffected praise of peasant life written in Spenserian stanza. Burn's sole poetical work is his volume of Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect published in 1786 at the town of Kilmarnock. This volume includes such poems as “The Cotter's Saturday Night”, “To a Mouse”, “To a Louse”, “The Two Dogs”, “The Holy Fair”, and “Scotch Drik”. It contains more than two hundred songs, a great number of epistles, epigrams, elegies and others. His poems are subjective and are charged with emotion. His songs are direct transcripts from personal experience. He wrote frankly as a peasant and represented the feelings and thoughts and racy humour of the Scottish farmers. He wrote about the animals and showed his humanitarian Spirit. He contrasts the homely life of the peasants with the artificial refinements of the fashionable persons.

b) Thomas Gray (1716-1771)

He was a born-poet who fell upon an age of prose. His poetic output is meagre. The elegiac note is predominant in him. A philosophic melancholy was the main source of his poetic inspiration. His most famous poem is “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard”. His love of nature is deep and genuine. His poetry under the influence of the spreading democratic spirit reaches out to include humble aspects of life. His two great odes, “The Progress of Poesy” and “The Bard” are filled with the new conception of the poet as an inspired singer rather than an accomplished artist.

c) William Blake (1757-1827)

He was the son of an Irishman was born in London. There is absolute sincerity and mystic renunciation in his poetry. His mind goes into the reasons of the Absolute and he presented his thoughts as a group of strange, complicated symbols. The elements of Romanticism are present in his poetry. He was the most significant and forceful among the host of poets who tried to bring in the romantic elements in his poems. Blake saw the world with the fresh wonder of a child awakening to the beauty and joy of life. He was the first English poet who felt the influences of the back to nature cult which is the essence of romantic poetry. They are a sense of wonder contemplation of nature through fresh eyes, and whatever belongs to a sensibility suffused with imagination. Blake’s doctrine is a vast gospel of liberty. He is the prince of spiritual revolt. His *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794) are the most popular of his poems. He has been chiefly considered as a lyric poet. He has the faculty of unreserved

self-revelation. . In the poems of Blake we find a complete break from classical poetry. He is more with romantics. His flare of lyricism, his love of nature and his suggestion of beauty really made him the most dominating poet among the precursors of the Romantic Revival.

2. Characteristic Features of Pre-Romantic Poetry

- The pre-Romantic tradition was characterized by an enthusiasm for the classical production of an increasingly personal nature that have elements of nostalgia and sublime.
- The pre-Romantic poets wrote according to specific poetic traditions and they thought that high thoughts should be presented by high language.
- In pre-Romantic poetry personality was eliminated from the discourse.
- They used elevated diction and style (use of metaphorical and figurative language and personifications).

Conclusion

Pre-Romanticism refers to the period in European literature that occurred between the Augustan age and the era of Romanticism, covering the years from approximately the middle of the eighteenth century to the late 1790s. Pre-Romanticism is a general term applied by modern literary historians to a number of developments in late 18th-century literature and culture that are thought to have prepared the ground for Romanticism in its full sense.