

History of English Language and Literature
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Lecture 14
The Revival of Romance

Hello everyone. Let me welcome you to yet another session of the NPTEL course the history of English language and literature. The objective of today's lecture is to draw your attention to the transitional elements from the Augustan age towards the romantic age. We begin to notice in one of the earlier sessions itself that the Augustan age had gone out of fashion. The classical writings had gone out of fashion by the mid 18th century and also there was a growing interest in the more spontaneous and a more natural form of writing.

And the following age being the romantic age it is important for us to delineate the ways in which the age began to transcend the classical elements and the 18th century how it paved way to the romantic elements of the 19th century. Even when we began talking about the long 18th century it was highlighted when it was brought to your attention that it is very difficult to classify this age and talk about it under one particular rubric term.

And we noticed that the age after many influences it is known as the age of classicism. It is known as the Augustan age. It is age of enlightenment. It is the age of sensibility. It is also named after particular major writers such as the age of Pope or the age of Johnson. It is also the age of the novel.

So given these multiple influences and given these various ways in which the grammar of this particular century has been fashioned it is very important for us to notice how towards the end of the 18th century there was an increasing waviness about whatever had dominated that particular century and also how it began to move away from whatever had dominated the 18th century.

And just like we had noticed in many of the earlier discussions about this transition phase, we also noticed that there is always a growing tendency to react against the dominant forms of writing, dominant ideology or even any form of dominant political thought. So in that sense towards the end of the 18th century we again notice a reactionary kind of writing setting in leading towards a romantic revival. So this lecture titled The Revival of Romance.

This lecture titled The Revival of Romance begins by taking a look at revival of interest in the middle ages which has later come to be known as growing interest in medievalism. This interest in romance and this interest in this middle ages and the fascination about the ancient elements built in to weight the primitive elements, the magical elements, all of those put together.

It began to introduce a new kind of genre itself especially in the later 18th century. And one of the most important figures when we talk about this is Horace Walpole.

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+ Medievalism

- A growing interest in the middle ages – a revival of romance – medievalism
 - A craze for the ancient, the primitive, the magical
- **Horace Walpole** – fascinated with medieval history, built a fake gothic castle – Strawberry Hill House
- *Castle of Otranto, A Story* (1765)
 - The first Gothic romance
- Ruins, castles, ancient buildings, ghosts, the supernatural
- Gray – so frightened that he dreaded to go upstairs to bed
- Byron – “the first romance in the language”
- Scott – praised it with ‘reckless generosity’

We have already talked about him in the context of other writings. Horace Walpole was one person who was really fascinated with mediaeval history. He even went to the extent of building a fake gothic castle which he named as Strawberry Hill House. This was initially just a small cottage that he had got on lease and later he went on to build his own gothic castle which was even recreated as recently as in 2012.

So the first picture is an earlier graphic representation of this Strawberry Hill House and this was the source of much fascination and much interest for most of the contemporaries of Walpole.

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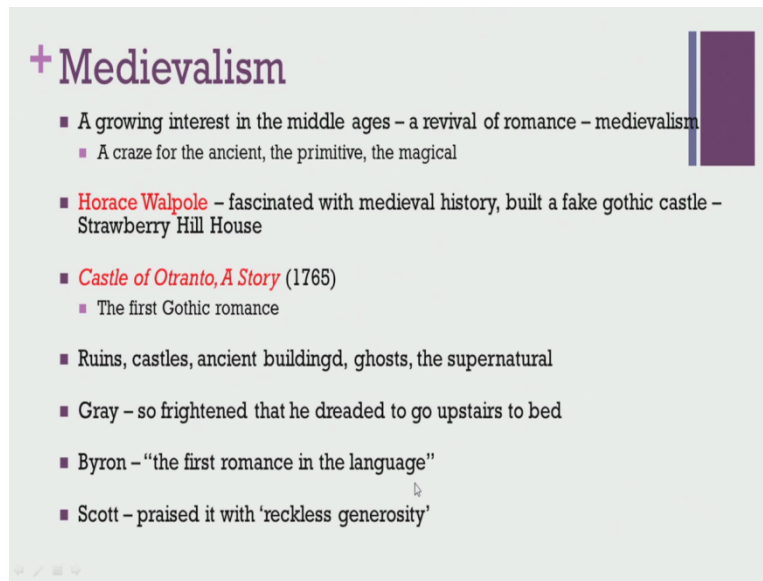


And Walpole then took this wonder work of architecture to another level to even composing an entire novel based on this title the Castle of Otranto, A Story. This was published in 1765. This work instantly was then recorded as the first Gothic romance in the English literary history. So what were the major elements of Gothic romance? This was a recreation of the earlier kinds of mediaeval romances.

And the integral part of any kind of Gothic romance included ruins, castles, something to do with ancient building, about ghost, the supernatural elements and everything which could be related to the mediaeval times and romantic stories of those times. So this particular work the Castle of Otranto, it was immensely popular and it also got great reviews from not just the contemporaries but also from the major writers of the 19th century romantic period.

It is said that Gray was so frightened by this mysterious work that he even dreaded to go upstairs to bed. And Byron praised this as the first romance in the language taking into account that this was some work which was produced in the 18th century, much after the medieval ages were over and done.

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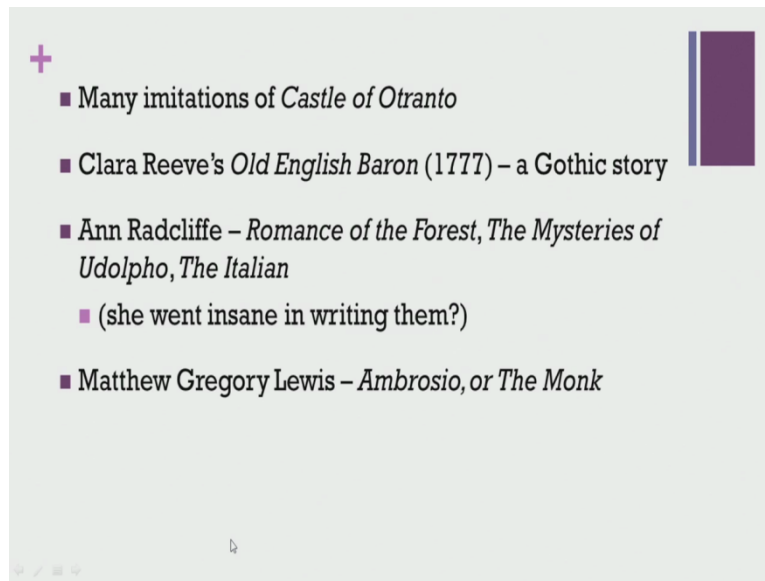
+ Medievalism

- A growing interest in the middle ages – a revival of romance – medievalism
 - A craze for the ancient, the primitive, the magical
- **Horace Walpole** – fascinated with medieval history, built a fake gothic castle – Strawberry Hill House
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And Scott who was generally always a lavish with his praises, he continued to praise Castle of Otranto with a reckless sense of generosity. Owing to the success of Castle of Otranto it led to a number of imitations and some of the significant ones are being listed here. Clara Reeve’s Old English Baron published in 1777 gained much popularity in success as a Gothic story. Ann Radcliffe went on to write a couple of Gothic romances including Romance of the Forest, The Mysteries of Udolpho and The Italian.

So the rumour is that she wrote so many of these Gothic romances with all the supernatural elements built into it that she even went insane in writing them. But however this is quite an unfounded fact as well. Matthew Gregory Lewis who wrote Ambrosio or The Monk also was credited as one of the earliest Gothic writers.

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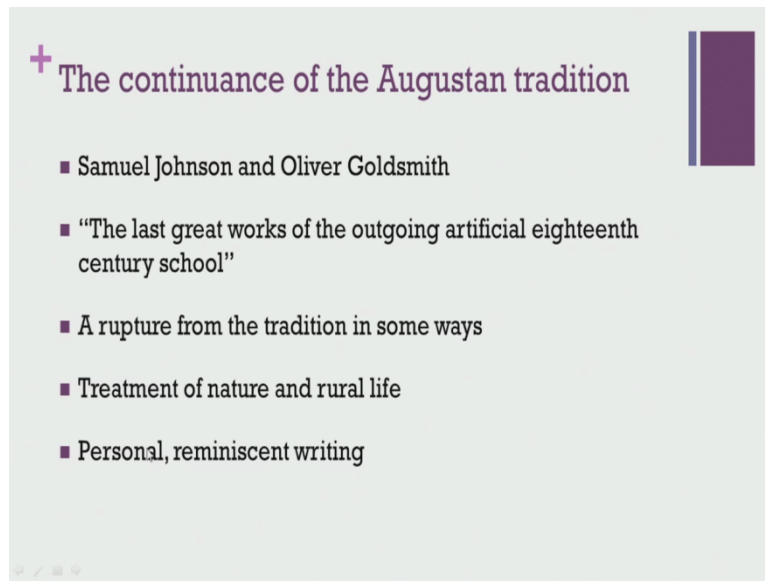
When we look at the 18th century as a transitional phase as we noted in the beginning of this lecture, it is important to notice that towards the end of the 18th century the Augustan tradition had begun to wane away but it had not completely gone out of fashion. We find a certain sense of a continuation of the Augustan tradition in the writings of Samuel Johnson and then the writings of Oliver Goldsmith.

And the historians hump and talk about these works as the last great works of the outgoing artificial 18th century school. But though we find a continuance of the tradition in the writings of Johnson and Goldsmith, we also find it that they also introduced a kind of rupture from the tradition in certain ways.

For example in their works we noticed treatment of nature and rural life because towards the end of his career we find Samuel Johnson revising his earlier poem *London* which was something we noticed when we spoke about Johnson. He revised his poem *London* and he also regrets the fact that in the first edition he had not built in many pastoral elements.

So Johnson's interest in pastoral poetry and in rural life could be seen as a way in which he seeks to depart from the dominant tenets of the Augustan tradition. And in Goldsmith's writings also we find a certain personal reminiscent form dominating over the dry intellectual wit of the Augustan tradition.

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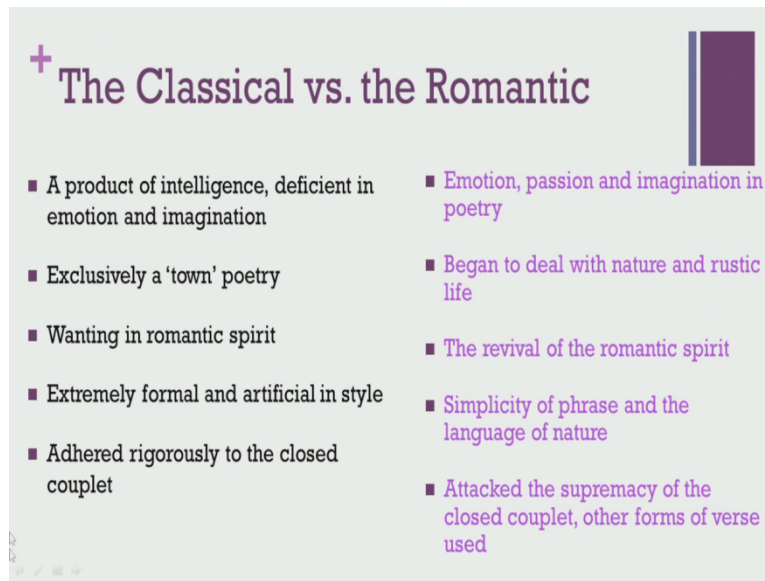
+ The continuance of the Augustan tradition

- Samuel Johnson and Oliver Goldsmith
- “The last great works of the outgoing artificial eighteenth century school”
- A rupture from the tradition in some ways
- Treatment of nature and rural life
- Personal, reminiscent writing

If we try to compare the romantic elements of the late eighteenth century with that of the classical elements which dominated the early eighteenth century, it is useful to also recall that some of the major elements of classical poetry, something that we had taken a look at in the earlier sessions as well. Classical poetry in general it was a product of intelligence, it was deficient in emotion and imagination.

It was exclusively a town poetry and did not take into consideration the rustic life of England at all. It was found majorly wanting in romantic spirit. It was a dried intellectual and there was no sense of any emotional element in that. We also find that in terms of writing style it was extremely formal and artificial even to the point of readiness. We also find that in terms of form it strictly adhered to the closed couplet form which was more rigorous than the blank verse which was prevalent in the previous century.

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+ The Classical vs. the Romantic

- A product of intelligence, deficient in emotion and imagination
- Exclusively a 'town' poetry
- Wanting in romantic spirit
- Extremely formal and artificial in style
- Adhered rigorously to the closed couplet
- Emotion, passion and imagination in poetry
- Began to deal with nature and rustic life
- The revival of the romantic spirit
- Simplicity of phrase and the language of nature
- Attacked the supremacy of the closed couplet, other forms of verse used

So compared to the classical form of writing the romantic style of writing had more freedom inherent in it. So if we compare it with the classical form we begin to notice that this had more emotion, passion and imagination in poetry. It began to deal with nature and rustic life rather than with the life in town. There was a revival of the romantic spirit which was seen severely wanting in the earlier classical line writing form.

There was also a simplicity of phrase and a form of shift towards the language of nature. So in that sense artificiality was completely abandoned towards the end of the 18th century. And we find this replicating in the novel form as well because there was a way in which language was coming closer to the (la) spoken language, the language of the common man than with the language of the learned men and women who were more classical in nature compared to the others.

So in the form of writing they were continuing changes to be witnessed. we find that the romantic writers they attacked the supremacy of the closed couplet, we also began to adopt other forms of verses, other forms of writing including the blank verse which was more popular in the earlier century.

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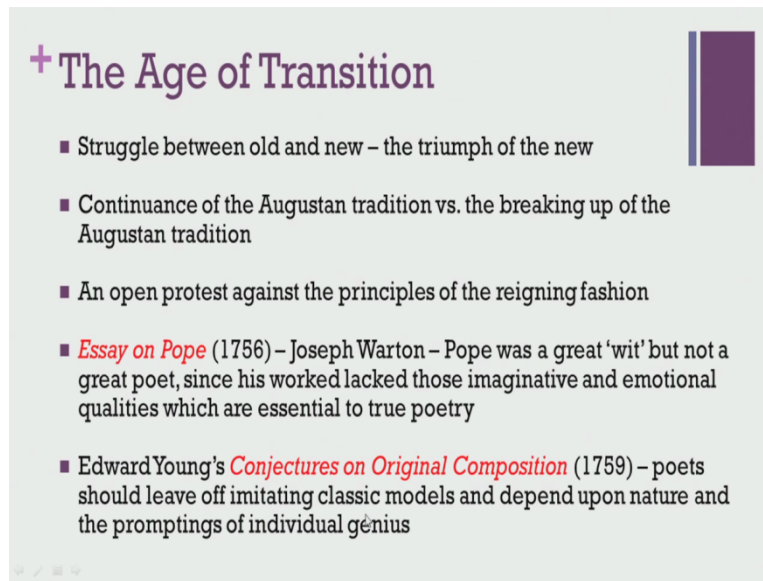
- Emotion, passion and imagination in poetry
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So talking about this age as an age of transition it is important to highlight that there was a struggle between the old and the new especially from the mid 18th century onwards and we eventually find the triumph of the new. So in that sense it was also a struggle between the continuance of the Augustan tradition with the breaking up of the Augustan tradition. And we also find many of the writers registering an open protest against the principles of the reigning Augustan writing principles and the reigning Augustan fashion.

For example Joseph Warton published an essay on Pope in 1756 where he argued that Pope was a great wit but not a great poet since his work lacked those imaginative and emotional qualities which are essential to true poetry. So we find writers daring to question the Augustan traditions and even the Augustan (mat) masters to the extent of rejecting their work from the understanding of poetry itself.

Edward Young's *Conjectures on Original Composition* published in 1759 was yet another open protest. It argued that the poets should leave off imitating classic models and depend upon nature and the promptings of individual genius.

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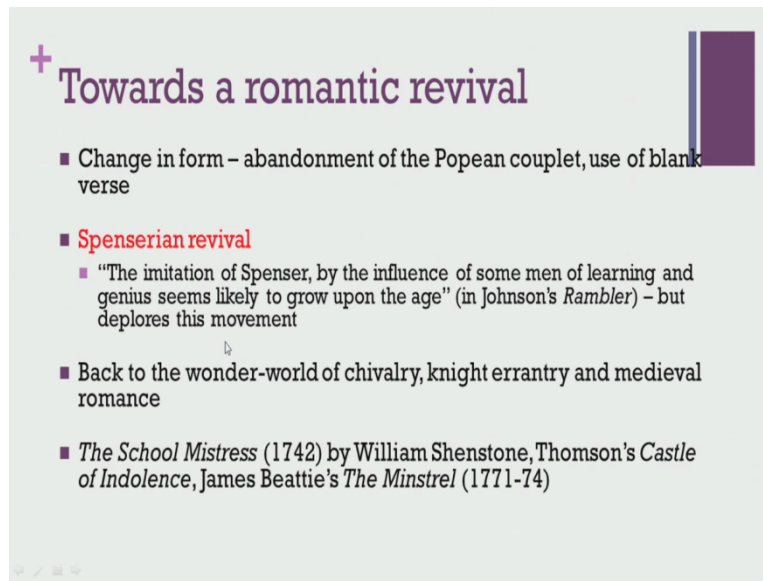
+ The Age of Transition

- Struggle between old and new – the triumph of the new
- Continuance of the Augustan tradition vs. the breaking up of the Augustan tradition
- An open protest against the principles of the reigning fashion
- *Essay on Pope* (1756) – Joseph Warton – Pope was a great ‘wit’ but not a great poet, since his work lacked those imaginative and emotional qualities which are essential to true poetry
- Edward Young’s *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759) – poets should leave off imitating classic models and depend upon nature and the promptings of individual genius

So as we have noted in some of the earlier session many other socio-political forces also led to this levelling kind of approach towards literature, towards the classical writings. So all of this had to eventually lead to a romantic revival which was primarily visible in terms of a change in form. We find the writers increasingly abandoning the Popean couplet which was more popular in the early 18th century and were all turning to blank verse which Pope and his contemporaries had much derided.

We also find a renewed interest in earlier writers such as Milton and Spenser. There is particularly a Spenserian revival which dominates the later 18th century. And in Johnson's *Rambler* we find a certain record of this. Samuel Johnson writes, The imitation of Spenser, by the influence of some men of learning and genius seems likely to grow up on the age. But nevertheless it also useful to remember that this movement, this shift towards this Spenserian kind of writing was something that Johnson completely deplored.

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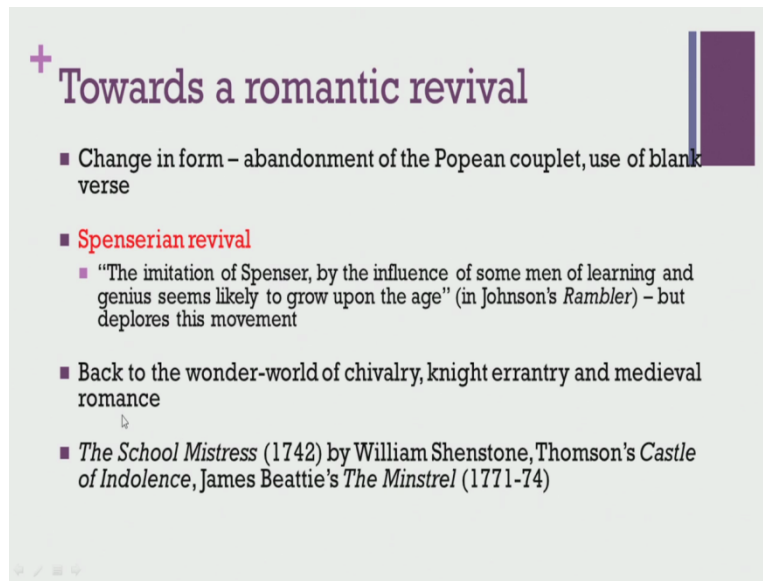
+ Towards a romantic revival

- Change in form – abandonment of the Popean couplet, use of blank verse
- **Spenserian revival**
 - “The imitation of Spenser, by the influence of some men of learning and genius seems likely to grow upon the age” (in Johnson's *Rambler*) – but deplores this movement
- Back to the wonder-world of chivalry, knight errantry and medieval romance
- *The School Mistress* (1742) by William Shenstone, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, James Beattie's *The Minstrel* (1771-74)

If you remember Johnson was extremely critical of the writings of Milton and Spenser and he also thought that they all read of a lot of sentimentalism compared to the intellectual dry wit that he was more in appreciation of. So with this Spenserian revival we find the English society being taken back to the wonder world of chivalry, knight errantry and mediaeval romance.

And this was again it is useful to remember that this was something which was a much looked down upon in the early 18th century. So this Spenserian revival is particularly reflected in some of the writings of those period including William Shenstone's *The School Mistress* published in 1742. Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* and James Beattie's *The Minstrel* published as a series from 1771 till 74.

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+ Towards a romantic revival

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- Back to the wonder-world of chivalry, knight errantry and medieval romance
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So alongside there is also a going admiration of Milton who had gone quite out of fashion in the early 18th century. Accordingly we find a series of writers trying to imitate the Miltonic style of writing and also going back to a certain pastoral kind of poetry with a lot of Miltonic (())(13:44). In that sense the some of these writers deserve special mention such as James Thompson’s *Seasons*, Somerville’s *The Chase*, Young’s *Night Thoughts*, Blair’s *The Grave*, John Dyer’s *The Ruins of Rome* and Akenside’s *The Pleasures of the Imagination*.

So all of these changes they were getting affected right from the mid 18th century onwards and we fight them rightfully culminating in the romantic movement by the end of the 18th century.

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+ Growing admiration of Milton

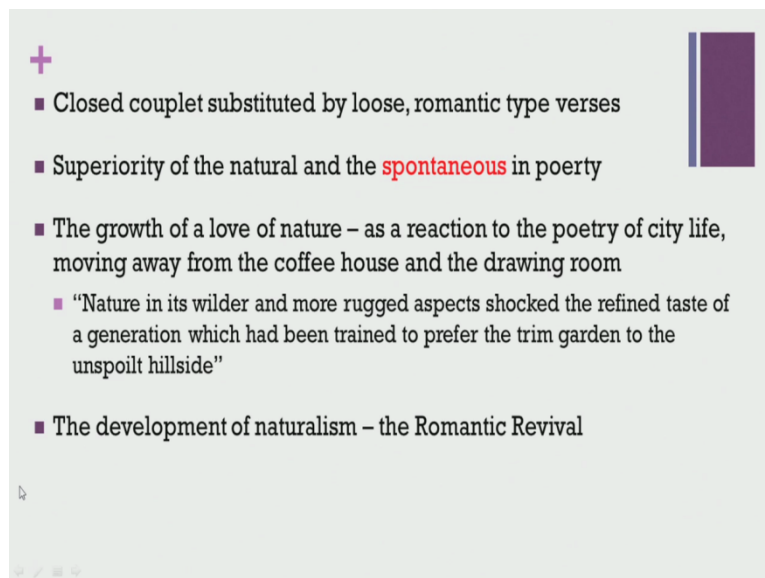
- James Thomson’s *Seasons*
- Somerville’s *The Chase*
- Young’s *Night Thoughts*
- Blair’s *The Grave*
- John Dyer’s *The Ruins of Rome* (1740)
- Akenside’s *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744)

And all of those writer's some of the common elements deserves special mention. They all had substituted the closed couplet with other loose romantic type verses, the most dominant one being blank verse. We find all of them (stress) stressing on these elements of superiority of the natural and the spontaneous in poetry because this was something which had gone entirely out of fashion especially in the early 18th century. So accordingly and quite unsurprisingly there is also a growing love for nature.

This was a more like a reaction to the town poetry of the Augustan period and we also find that the poetry begins to gradually move away from the coffee house and from the drawing room where it was limited to particularly in the age of Pope. Hudson talks about this particular shift in these terms. Nature in its wilder and more rugged aspects shocked the refined taste of a generation which had been trained to prefer the trim garden to the unspoilt hillside.

So as a reaction romantic poetry it really had begun to celebrate and appreciate the unspoiled hillside or to the trim garden which was more popular in the early Augustan period. So all together in multiple ways there is a tendency towards romantic revival through a development of naturalism.

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That also now forces us to take a look at what naturalism is? In simple terms it is a return to nature which was also call to come back to nature and it (al) also had led to the phenomenal event The French Revolution. So the relationship between all of these political events with

the romantic revival of the late 18th century is something that we shall come back to again in one of the later sessions.

So what perhaps triggered this naturalism or the return to nature movement in England was the ballad revival which happened towards the end of the 18th century. This was quite despite the ridicule that Samuel Johnson had against ballad during the 18th century because he did not find them acceptable in any form because he thought they were too trivial to even be considered as a literature.

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The slide features a title 'Naturalism = 'return to nature'' in purple text with a small purple plus sign to its left. To the right of the title is a vertical purple bar. Below the title is a list of four bullet points, each preceded by a small purple square. The first bullet point is 'The ballad revival (despite Johnson's ridicule of old ballads)'. The second is 'Movement towards simplicity'. The third is 'Rejecting the carefully cultivated conventional mannerisms of the Augustan age'. The fourth is 'Eg: "God rest his soul" improved and refined to "Eternal blessings on his shade attend"'. At the bottom left of the slide, there are small navigation icons.

+ Naturalism = 'return to nature'

- The ballad revival (despite Johnson's ridicule of old ballads)
- Movement towards simplicity
- Rejecting the carefully cultivated conventional mannerisms of the Augustan age
- Eg: "God rest his soul" *improved and refined* to "Eternal blessings on his shade attend"

And alongside the ballad revival there is a tendency to move towards simplicity and most of the major poets and the major writers of those times they begin to also reject the carefully cultivated conventional mannerisms of the Augustan age.

For example if you recall in one of the earlier session we had spoken about the way in which the Augustan writers sort to improve and refine language so that it became not just refined but also more complicated to the common man's understanding. For example a popular phrase from one of the ballads, God rest his soul. It was improved and refined to Eternal blessings on his shade attend.

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+ Naturalism = 'return to nature'

- The ballad revival (despite Johnson's ridicule of old ballads)
- Movement towards simplicity
- Rejecting the carefully cultivated conventional mannerisms of the Augustan age
- Eg: "God rest his soul" *improved and refined* to "Eternal blessings on his shade attend"

So these sort of refinement on the language was no longer found acceptable towards the end of the 18th century because this kind of over influence on the intellectualism and over influence on the superiority of artificial language, it began to be much derided towards the end of the 18th century. So with this the time was quite right for the romantic revival to completely sweep over all of the literary traditions of those times and also we find that the romanticism begins to dominate the 19th century.

So in next session we shall continue to look at the various forms of writings and the various writers who encouraged this form of naturalism in their writings and how the transition effectively took place through this form of natural expressions in language. So with this we also begin to wrap up today's lecture in anticipation of the next lecture which shall be taking a closer look at what exactly the Romantic Movement was? Thank you for listening and I look forward to see you in the next session.