

# Changing characteristics of poetry from modern to romantics essay sample

[Literature](#), [Poetry](#)



The characteristics of poetry changed with the changing of eras and literary periods. Romantics have their own features and writing style. Nature and beauty play very important role in Romantic poetry. Victorian poetry is different from Romantics because its themes are about Victorian age, which is influenced by democracy, evolutionary sciences and industrial revolution. After that the Modern age comes and its themes and style of writings are entirely different from Romantic and Victorian poetry. Modern poetry has its own themes such as, isolation, anxieties and disillusionment of modern man in the time of post-World war. This paper aim to show the changing characteristics of poetry from Romantic to Modern age.

“ Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response”. (Mark Flanagan). The Romantic Movement at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century was a deliberate revolt against the literary principles of the age of Reason. Romantics poets rejected the neo-classical principles in favor of the Romantics. In doing so, they reverted to the Elizabethan or the first romantic age in English literature. The romantic in ordinary life is an escape from its monotonous routine, its conventionality and custom. The three impulses of the romantic imagination, passion for nature, yearning for the past. The Romanticism was nothing but an extension to the field of literature of man’s unquenchable thirst for beauty that lies in the strange, the extraordinary, the remote combination of the strange and beauty constitutes the romantic in literature.

Some of the greatest and most popular English poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats belong to this period. This period starts from 1798 with the publication of Lyrical Ballads. The important characteristics of Romantic poetry include love for nature, emotions, beauty, imagination, symbolism and individualism. All these characteristics can be seen in the poetry of romantic poetry. Wordsworth is famous as the greatest nature poet of England and his contemporaries Byron, Shelley and Keats were great lovers of nature. Wordsworth treated nature differently from other poets. He worshiped nature, because he saw in all natural objects the indwelling spirit of the Supreme Being. Nature was also healer and soother for him when he was in the grip of a great spiritual crisis. England's declaration of war against France was a great shock to Wordsworth. He saw nature mothering and consoling from the very childhood. He describes this emotion in these lines: Fair seed time had my soul, and I grew up

Fostered alike by beauty and by fear;

Much Favored in my birthplace, and no less

In that beloved vale to which ere long

We were transplanted (The Prelude Book 1: 301-305) Shelley's conception of nature in his short lyrics varied according to the mood he was in. Sometimes he saw nature as one, as an individual and at another time he saw nature not as one being but as many beings as men of mythological times saw it. He made new myths out of the various objects of nature. Nature for Wordsworth was a spiritual reality and Shelley agreed with this conception but he endowed nature with intellect. In the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, the poet

imagines the whole earth as being illuminated by the glory of this universal spirit and the same thing is present in Hymn to the Spirit of Nature: Lamp of earth! Where're thou lovest

Its dim shapes are clad with brightness,

And the souls of whom thou lovest

Walk upon the winds with lightness.

Here Shelley has made nature as being permeated, vitalized and real by a universal spirit of love and Beauty. While Shelley intellectualized nature and Wordsworth spiritualized it, Keats only visualized it so as to express it as it is felt through our five senses. The Ode to Autumn, in which Keats has glorified Nature, is a poem which for richness and color has never been surpassed.

These lines show his love for nature as a romantic poet: Where are the songs of spring?

Ay, where are they

Think not of them

Though has thy music too. (Ode to Autumn: stanza 3) Imagination has much importance in the poetry of Romantics. Wordsworth and Coleridge formulated the theory that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Wordsworth's poetry is highly imaginative when he makes ordinary things as high level through imagination. In A Solitary Reaper, Wordsworth's imagination changed the song of a hill girl as a lofty one. The Prelude is a history of Wordsworth's imagination: Wisdom and Spirit of the universe.....

But with high objects, with enduring things

Wordsworth's bud-nesting adventure that led him to reflective ecstasy: Dust as we are, the immortal soul grows..... In one society. Imagination has a real relation with Keats's poetry. In Keats we find "imaginative phrases" which have power to delight the aesthetic sense. Ode to a Grecian Urn contains vivid imagination. In the Eve of St. Agnes, he draws the pictures of the statues of kings and queens and represents them as capable of feeling cold through his imagination: The sculptur'd dead on each side, seem to freeze, He passeth by and his weak spirit fails

To think how they may ache in icy hoods and mails. (Eve of St. Agnes: 14-18) Shelley has used symbols through his imaginative power. The West wind is a symbol of many things such as nature, God-head, resurrection and revolution. Shelley, at the end of Adonais, symbolized the boat as human soul such as: The breath whose might I have invoked in song Descends on me; my spirit bark is driven

Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng Whose sails were never to the tempest given. (Adonais: LV, 487-490) The role of beauty is very much evident in Romantic poets. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats, all poets of Romanticism praised beauty in their poetry. In his youth, Wordsworth took up the physical beauty of nature. He was attracted by the outward appearances of nature and her grandeur in color and beauty. He described the external features of nature. The grandeur of the mountain's torrent appeals to him because he can link its beauty in his mind with the beauty of clouds with the charm of a young girl's face. Keats can be said as a

poet of beauty as he praised it through his symbols. For Keats, beauty was the main principle of life. Keats related the beauty with the mighty abstract idea of beauty. This passion, Shelley called "intellectual beauty". The first line of Endymion strikes Keats's inspiration of nature: The thing of beauty is a joy forever.

Shelley, another lover of beauty did not devote his life to the pursuit of physical beauty but for the ideal love and Beauty which he yearned for all his life. This spirit he has beautifully described in Hymn to Intellectual Beauty: Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate

With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon Of human thought or form, \_  
where art thou gone?

Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,

This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate?

(Hymn to Intellectual Beauty 11, 13-17) Thus each one of Romantic poet gave his own interpretation of the universe, the relation of God, the connection between the visible and the invisible, nature and man. They refused to accept the ideas of other men on trust or to sacrifice imagination to argument. By means of their creative art they tried to awake the imagination of the reader to the reality that lies behind and to rouse him from the dead and dull routine of customs of life. After the Romantic age, the Victorian age starts and the poetry written in this era was different in themes, style and diction from Romantic poetry. The Victorian age in English literature began in second quarter of the nineteenth century and ended by 1900.

It was the age of democracy, individualism, rapid industrial development and material expansion. It was the age of doubt and pessimism, following the new conception of man formulated by science and Evolution. The most important poets during Victorian period were Tennyson, Browning and Arnold. The three important movements of the age were these: industrial revolution, the rise of democracy and the rise of evolutionary science and its impact on religion. It was an age in which the democratic spirit was rising and the people were clamoring for equal rights and political freedom.

Tennyson represents the Victorian hypocrisy and the spirit of compromise in his treatment of love, sex and marriage. He was a moralist and mouth piece of the Victorians. The legendary Ulysses gives message of action to readers: Strike, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Victorian's anxieties of life and depression due to evolutionary science are presented in Tennyson's poetry. He gives a compromise between science and religion. In Memoriam he says: Let knowledge grow from more to more

And more of reverence in us dwell  
That mind and soul, according well,  
May make one music as before.

Browning expressed the spirit of Victorian age in Rabbi Ben Ezra. He gave quite accurate and vivid pictures of human life and circumstances of that age. There is a robust optimism reflected in all his poetry. His firm belief in the immortality of soul which is beautifully expressed in the following lines of Pippa Passes: The year's at the spring

And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hill side's dew pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snails on the thorn  
God's in his heaven  
All's right with the world.

Arnold's poetry is most representative of the Victorian age. He complained about the conflict between science and religion: The sea of faith  
Was once; too, at the full, and round earth's shore Lay like the folds of a  
bright girdle furl'd But now I only hear  
Its long, melancholy, withdrawing roar.

In *The Memorial Verses*, the Victorian age is described as "the iron age".  
Victorian poetry also represents the view of nature but different from  
Romantics. Tennyson's view of nature lies in its atmospheric subjectivity. In  
*The Lotos-Eaters*, the companions of Ulysses read their own feelings into the  
surroundings; while suggest the dreamy, languid atmosphere of the place.  
They have eaten of the indolence-giving fruit and sing songs: There is sweet  
music here that softer falls,

Than petals from blown roses on the grass,  
Or night dews on still waters between walls  
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass.

(Choric song, 1, 1-4). Browning's nature description is cosmopolitan as  
nature in his poetry is not of one country, but of many countries. In



Grammarian's Funeral, he makes us feel the presence of the objects of nature like fresh air, top peak, soundless meteors, roaming clouds, flashing lightning and twinkling stars. Here's the top-peak; the multitude below

Live, for they can, there:

This man decide not to live but know

Bury this man there?

Here\_ Here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form, Lightening are loosened.

(A Grammarian's Funeral, 137-142). Arnold's description of nature is something near the Romantics. In Quiet Work and Self-Dependence, nature teaches Arnold wisdom and tranquility. In Resignation, Arnold describes nature as a source of peace rather than joy: That general life, which dose not cease,

Whose secret is not joy, but peace.

His description of nature is vivid in these lines:

The sea is calm to -night

The tide is full, the moon lies fair

Upon the straits; \_ on the French coast the light Gleams and is gone, the cliffs of England stand, Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. (Dover Beach; 1-5). Victorian poetry also has imagery and emotions. Tennyson's use of simile and metaphor is characterized by originality and aptness. His imagination is present in these lines as well: To dream and dream, like yonder amber light

Which will not leave the myth-bush on the height? Tennyson has used the blank verse in *The Princess*, the idylls of king and the English idylls. Browning is indeed gifted with an unlimited power of imagination which is always embraces every real thing happening in human life. His poems such as *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Cleon*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, have pictures of significant details. Browning's theory of art is in *Andrea Del Sarto*. Arnold is slightly different from other Victorian poets in reviving classicism in form and content. Clarity, lucidity and brevity are present in his poetry. He always aimed at nobility of thought and expression. He described in *Scholar Gipsy*:  
Still nursing the unconquerable hope

Still clutching the inviolable shade. (211-212) Expression is beautifully presented in these lines:

Eyes too expressive to be blue,  
Too lovely to be grey.

The Victorian poetry is too much represented of its age specially that of Tennyson. In *The Princess*, he dealt with an important problem of that time \_ that of the higher education of women and their place in the society. In *Maud*, he gave expression to the patriotic passion aroused on account of the Crimean War. Thus in all poems, the changing moods of the Victorian age are successively represented such as doubts, misgiving, hopefulness etc. Modern poetry, of which T. S. Eliot is the chief representative, has followed entirely a different tradition from the Romantic and Victorian tradition of poetry. A study of nineteenth century poetry reveals the fact that its main characteristic was preoccupation with a dream world as we find in Keats's *La*

Belle Dame Sans Merci and Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott*. The poetry of Victorian era could not find favor with the critics and readers of the 20th century because of radical changes that had taken place. Poetry for modern poets is not a medium for philosophy and other extraneous matters, nor is it singing for its own sake. It is a method of discovering one's self so it is essential to introduce new technique of communication to discover the meanings.

This necessity brought the movements known as Imagism and Symbolism. Symbolism is used to express the individual emotions of the poet in a language which seems best adapted to convey his essential quality without caring for meters and structures. Imagism on the other hand is used to give clarity of expressions through hard, accurate and definite images. Among the Modern poets, Gerard Manley Hopkins has a great name. Hopkins tried to revive the "sprung rhythm" in the poetry. This rhythm follows the system of beats and stresses unlike the quantitative meters where every syllable is counted. This rhythm is nearer to natural speech, so the Modern poets appealed by this use of rhythm. Hopkins was endowed with highly sensuousness but had an abiding faith in God. He could perceive God in every object and tried to find its inner kernel of its being or its very soul which was expressed by its outer form. This quality in every thing which is the manifestation of Beauty was called by Hopkins as "inscape". The poems of Hopkins are about God, nature and Man. His greatest poem *The Wreck of Deutschland* is full of storm and agony, revealing the mystery of God's way to men: Thou mastering me

God! Giver of breath and bread;

World's strand, sway of the sea;

Lord of living and dead.

Hopkins's sprung rhythm is seen in his poem *Pied Beauty*:

Glory be to God for dappled things

For skies of couple-color as a brinded cow; For rose-moles all in stipple up on trout that swim, Fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls; Finches' wings (*Pied Beauty*, 1-4).

Symbols are also very much present in Hopkins's poetry. In *The Caged Skylark*, he uses the symbol of cage like a human body in which soul is poisoned. It also deals with resurrection of sinful soul of man. As a dare-gale skylark scanted in a dull cage Man's mounting spirit in his bone house, mean house, dwells That bird beyond the remembering his free fells, This in drudgery, day-laboring-out life's age. Among Modern poets, Yeats is one who used imagery and symbols perfectly. A Vision gave Yeats a philosophical framework for his poems as *Phases of the Moon*, *Shepherd and Goatherd*, *Byzantium* and *All Soul's Night*.

Legends and persons in Irish mythology find a big place in Yeats's poetry such as: *An Irish Airman foresees His Death*, *Easter 1916* etc. Nostalgia for old Ireland is vividly present in his poetry such as these lines: Before that ruin came, for centuries, Rough men-at-arm, cross-gartered to the knees Or shed in iron, climbed the narrow stairs, And certain men-at-arms these were Whose images, in the Great Memory stored (*The Tower*; 81-85). Magic and Occultism have a major role in Yeats's poetry. His *Autobiographies* is filled with stories of unexpected events, spirit contact and other paranormal

activities witnessed by Yeats. The theme of old age is present in his poems such as: *Sailing to Byzantium*, *the Tower* and *why not old Men should be Mad*. Among the Modern poets, T. S. Eliot is the greatest who has influenced modern poetry as well. Eliot is acutely aware of the present problems which face mankind in the modern times. His poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* expresses the disillusion, irony and disgust of the modern age. The condition of modern man is seen in his *Hollow Men* such as: *We are the hollow men*,

*We are stuffed men,*

*Leaning together,*

*His Headpiece filled with straw.*

The main features of 20th century are anxiety, disturbance and disintegration. The World war resulted anarchy and loss of faith and moral values. Eliot's poetry expresses vividly the condition of modern society. The best echo of the post-war age of disillusion is heard in his *The Waste Land*. The lines express the scene at that time: *April is the cruelest month, breeding*

*Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing*

*Memory and desire, stirring*

*Dull roots with spring rain.*

(*Burial of the Dead*, 1-4). Because of modern poet, Eliot's poetry is full of symbols and Metaphors and they have an individuality of their own. Such as in lines from *Prufrock* in which evening fog is compared to a cat: *The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes, The yellow smoke that rubs its*

muzzle on the window panes, Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening, Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains. (15-18). The waste land itself is a symbol of infertility and the expression of bitter sense of disillusionment of the post-war generation. He made his age conscious of itself and aware of the dangers in modern civilization. So the themes, characteristics, diction and poetic style changed throughout from Romantics to Moderns.

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