

## **ROMANTICISM VS CLASSICISM**

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Romanticism and classicism are such thought confounding terms that it is almost impossible to define either aright. If asked to define either of these two terms , most of us will probably evade is by saying – ‘ if not asked we know , if asked , we know not’.

Arts and literature often show two opposing tendencies that are called Romanticism and Classicism. First, we should agree that these terms are not meant to refer just to one type of literature or a single era in writing history. They exist in every culture’s or time’s writings as certain balancing patterns or tendencies. So, the history of literature does not separate periods simply into ‘romantic’ and ‘classical’ eras.

Romanticism refers to the tendency on the part of the creative writers, critics and artists to advocate individual freedom, to overemphasize the expression of personal emotion or personal vision, and to glorify the power of imagination as opposed to cold reason and intellect. Classicism on the other hand, refers to the tendency to emphasize the need of authority and tradition and of discipline, control, order, balance and proportion in art and literature. The one aims at heightening of the imaginative horizon and sharpening of the emotional sensibility while

the other aims at heightening of the intellectual horizon and sharpening of the reasoning faculty.

Romanticism and Classicism are based on the difference beliefs. The romantics believe that man is essentially perfect, it is a social institutions that lead him to perfection. It is their belief in the essential perfectibility of man that leads them to overemphasize the value of individual freedom. They think that since man is perfect , the needs no discipline, no control, no authority or tradition. Classicism, on the other hand, is based on just the opposite belief. Classicists believe that man is imperfect and that he can achieve perfection only through the acceptance of some authority or tradition. This is the reason why they overemphasize the value of authority and tradition and or discipline and control.

In this way Romanticism tends to emphasize freedom and experiment and classicism to discipline, control, order and balance. The one finds expression in the spirit of revolt against the established order authority and tradition for the sake of novelty and change; the other expresses itself in the spirit of acceptance and adherence to the established order, authority and tradition.

There are the impulses governing man --- the impulses of acceptance, the impulse to take for granted the other phenomenon, and the impulses of experiment, the impulse to confront the outer

phenomenon with the eyes of enquiry and wonder. Classicism results from the first and Romanticism from the second impulse. Classicism results when the instinct of acceptance ripens into a highly organized state of society or polished state of language. The Romantic elements develops when the instinct of wonder become predominant.

In this way classicism is characterized by the quality of artist in beauty and art, Romantic by the addition of strangeness to beauty. It is an addition of curiosity to the desire of beauty which is one of the essential elements that constitute romantic temper. The romantics love for the past, the strange and the wonderful, they often take an imaginative escape into the medieval world of romance, adventure and superstition that remote world of romance satisfies their sense of wonder and at the same time their sense of curiosity. This is the reason why romanticism is often defined as reawakening of the middle ages.

Romanticism lays stands on subjectivism and classicism on objectivity in art and literature. The true meaning of romanticism lies in the imaginative venture into the unplumbed depths of the soul in almost idealistic disregard for external reality. It is a withdrawal from outer experience to concentrate on inner experience. It in fact an emancipation of the world, of the mind and also of the vehicles of poetry from the bondage of fact, opinion, formality , discipline , and traditional control. When fact, opinion, control and tradition go out imagination comes in. This is why Romanticism is often defined as an extra – ordinary development imaginative sensibility.

The romantics often glorify the power of imagination. "Imagination, says C.M Bowra, is the very quintessence of romanticism ”.

William Blake goes to the extent of saying that the world of imagination is the world of eternity . It is a typical romantic glorification of imagination. It does not mean that romantic art is unreal . It is a reality reconstructed by the new powers or vision. In this way the peculiar quality of romanticism lies in this that in apparently detaching us from the real world, it seems is restore us to reality as a higher point. It rekindles the soul of the past or reveals the soul where no eye has yet descended it. It invests the objects of nature with the light that never was on the sea or land. It makes the natural supernatural and the supernatural natural. What Shelley says about the poet in the following lines is applicable to a very great tent to romantic poets in general:

“He will watch from down to gloom  
The lake reflected sun illumine,  
The yellow bees of the ivy – bloom,  
Nor need nor see, what thing they be,

But from these create he can  
Forms more real than loving man  
Nurslings of Immortality.”

What Shakespeare says, about the creative power of the poets in general is applicable to romantic poets in particular:

“The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to array nothing,  
A local habitation and a name.”

But when the romantic tendency goes to the extent of eccentricity waywardness and extravagance, it becomes a disease . With this comes the immediate need of discipline , control , and balance of reason, sanity and good sense . Romanticism yields place to classicism.

Therefore, Romanticism and classicism do not refer to the different periods in literary history, but to certain counterbalancing qualities and tendencies, running through all times and countries. Sometimes the one dominates and sometimes the other. In the Augustan age, certain classical qualities dominated and therefore, it is popularly known as the Neo – classical period in English history. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the romantic tendencies become predominant and therefore, it is known as ‘Romantic Age ’. But no age can be completely classical or completely romantic. Even in the Augustan age there were a number of poets who had certain romantic qualities in them. That age was not genuinely classical. It was rather pseudo – classical, because true classical art actually refers to the art and literature of ancient Greece or Rome.

Similarly, the beginning of the nineteenth century, which is popularly known as Romantic Age, shows certain classical qualities as well. Again, the romanticism that reached its apex of glory during this period was not a sudden outburst. Elizabeth age was also romantic in spirit. It showed ten romantic qualities that we find in the literature of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Just as ‘The Augustan Age’ is called a neo – classical or pseudo – classical period in English literary history, ‘The romantic age’ that came in the beginning of the nineteenth century may aptly be called a Neo – classical age. Both romantic and classical tendencies are always present in all the different periods in history. Therefore, it is very difficult to call a particular period classical and the other romantic. Similarly no great poet or artist can be completely romantic or completely classical. Wordsworth, who is popularly known as a great romantic poet of the nineteenth century, shows in his poems certain classical qualities as well. Similarly, in the poems of Keats we find a peculiar combination of both romanticism and classicism. Keats was romantic in inspiration and

classical in expression. It is this combination of both romantic and classical elements in his poem that make them works of art and beauty per-excellence.

Thus, both romanticism and classicism are complementary and not contradictory. Neither of the two is complete or perfect in itself. It is the combination of the two, in right proportion, that leads to the creation of a really great work of art. The distinction between the romantic and the classical is only a relative and not an absolute one. Whenever, they are combined in equal proportion, they produce the highest imaginative art that can withstand the touch of time.

The rhythm of a nation's mind is like a swing of pendulum. It follows the laws of alternate sequences. When rules and regulation begin to exercise tyrannical control over man's mind there starts a yearning for freedom. Therefore, mind revolts against the established order, Romanticism gives place to classicism. But too much of freedom gives rise to chaos and disorder. People again feel the need of rules and regulations, discipline and control. Classicism again yields place to romanticism.

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