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**Revisiting the Poetic Spirit of the Pre-Romantic Period through
Naturalistic Concerns in the Poems of Thomas Gray and William
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Abstract

Pre-Romantic period is marked as the predecessor period of the Romantic period in English Literature. Romantic period started with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 but most of the traits which are highly considered related to Romantic period are found before the period. During the early 18th century literature of England was shadowed by the foreign influences which brought materialism, artificiality, showiness, loftiness, highness and over all detachment from human sensibility, nature and rural life. There were some writers who started opposing the prevalent tendencies of the period and these writers are now known as pre-romantic poets. Most of the characteristics of the Romantic period are also traced in these poems. It was a kind of poetry that is characterised as a strong contrast with an artificial society and writing. These poets focused on nature's beauty, adventures, simplicity of life, supernaturalism, human's passions, rural background and overall human sensations. Naturalism is one of the part and parcel of pre-romantic poetry. It intends to show individual freedom as an ultimate reality.

Keywords: Simplicity of expressions, Lyricism, Human sensations, Individualism

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea to return to nature is considered as the seminal impact which caused the emergence of Romantic revival during the Neo-classical period of the 18th century. It was a cultural movement under the guise of literary expressions about the 1740s and onward. The emergence of the middle class as an influential literary patron and reading community marked suited its taste and made it the tendencies acceptable. Although it was any kind of political outlook yet it marked a cultural shift in the life and attitude of the people. There was host of people who were fed up the grandeur and elevated sentiments of the early 18th century in literary expressions as well as in cultural make shifts.

Edward Young Thomas Gray, William Collins, William Blake, James Thompson, Vincent Crabbe, Robert Burns and Oliver Goldsmith were some of the creative and revolutionary geniuses who revolted are known as the precursors of the revival Romanticism in British Literature. All of them have expressed their intense respect and concern to nature in

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all forms. They regarded nature as supreme authority. Although the movement was inspired by some of the influential writers of France. These writers had similar kind of tendency of writing contradicting the contemporary practices of the time. Romanticism came just in contrast to classicism and Pre-romanticism is called as the harbinger and processing path of the Romanticism in literature. The Classical poetry was the product of intelligence and artificial notions while pre-romantic poets started emotional and natural expressions. Pre-romantic poets involved themselves the emotions and imagination through mysterious and supernatural past. These poets wrote a very different kind of poem in the matter of style as well. The eighteenth-century poetry was formal and fundamentally didactic chiefly oriented to town and urban sensibilities but the pre-romantic poets wrote lyrical, emotional poems concerning to rural setting and people. The pre-romantic poets are also known as transitional poet and this transition was of values, style, themes and concerns. They expressed strong opposition against the stereotype values. They returned to the real nature of earth, natural scenes, forests, rivers, animals, landscapes and animals. They avoided the artificiality of town, coffee houses, taverns, clubs, political meetings and drawing rooms. The poetry of Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Gray express the love of nature, the feeling of picturesque and intense human sympathy for the poor and oppressed class of the society. Ideals of life, humanity, culture, and civilization were revived by these transitional poets who were establishing new era of literature and struggling against the prevalent notions and strong reasons of the classical poets and ideologies. They had strong attachment to the medieval beliefs which have been the integral part of their poetic expressions. The poetry of the transition period is marked with melancholic notions, insane behaviour, morbid attitude to life and human sensibilities. All of the preromantic poets aimed at the spirit of return to nature by depicting the picturesque, grandiose, desolate, wild and remote scenes of nature. They meditated on the sad fortune of the rural people. They have presented gothic sensibility in their works.

The poetry of Thomas Gray has the explicit and evident traits of romanticism. Gray's poetry undoubtedly expresses his temperament and elements of romanticism in exclusive manner. Most of his poems reflect the trends and directions of romanticism. But he was a man of social acceptance so in some of his poems there are elements of Neo classicism. So, in some of his poems there is dignified grandeur and mannerisms in style. It was so because there was transition of sensibility and activity. His early poems are exponent of his belief in classical tradition of writing but later he became conscious of his inner thoughts and started adopting the methods which suited to his personality most and now he regarded for his poems which are written in Romantic tradition. Gray's remarkable poem, "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is exponent of his make shift. The description of the common people in rural setting in rugged manner shows his great interest to the life of common human beings as well as the common practices of the villagers. Some of his other poems like "The Progress of Poesy", "The Bard" and "Ode on the Path of Favourite Cat" original poems having naturalistic elements.

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William Collins has shown great concern to the values of romanticism through his poetic endeavours. He had great interest in supernaturalistic and love for imagery and sensations. Through his poetry he has tried to revive the folklores of Scotland. His interest for mysticism, strange and remote conditions of human life, supernaturalism, and the traits of naturalism are widely present in his poetic works. He had great interest in the stories of fairies, genii, giants and monsters. "Ode to Evening" is one of the fine examples of Collins' love for nature. Through this poem he has presented his love of natural scenes and the art of making things alive with the help of imagery. One of his poems mourns the death of several soldiers fighting for freedom. There is vividness in his description of nature. His poems like "Ode for Music", "Ode to Evening" "Ode to Simplicity" "Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland" "Ode on the Death of Thomson" "Ode to the Passions" and Ode to Pity are some of his poems which are remarkable for the various elements of Naturalistic writing. Most of his poems have also the elements of Neo-classical trends.

Thus, is an obvious fact that the transitional poetry of the 18th century paved the right path for the Romantic period of the 19th century. Most of the poets who wrote against the prevalent methods and styles of the Neoclassical period are not recognised as Pre romantic poets. The poems of Gray and Collins are the true exponents of the emerging spirit of the Romanticism. They are rightly regarded as the harbingers of one of the finest periods of English literature. Whatever they anticipated have been finely adopted by the later poets and thinkers. Although the ideals what they followed were not new but they are privileged because they revived and made the ideals popular. Naturalism is a practice and philosophy which takes nature as an ultimate reality. It separates nature from God and subordinate spirits from matter. It ties to establish unchangeable laws as supreme philosophy of human life. It makes us aware of the unknowing nature of transcendental ideals. While reading the poetry of these poets we realise and get all elements of the romantic period. It is obvious that Romanticism started officially with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, yet the type of the poetry it advocated was not new for the readers so it was a continuation of the traits which were started by the transitional poets of England.

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