

Influence of the French Revolution on Romantic Poets

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The French Revolution started in 1789 and was about freedom and equality. People wanted to end the rule of kings and nobles and have fair rights for everyone, not just the rich. The revolution's motto was "**Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.**" The goal was to create a society where everyone was treated equally and had the same opportunities. The Romantics took inspiration from the revolution, composed poetry, and started a new era.

The Note will cover the following questions:

- Discuss the influence of the French Revolution on Romantic poets/poems.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)- Nature and Revolution:

William Wordsworth was greatly inspired by the French Revolution, especially in its early stages. He saw nature as a force that could uplift the spirit, much like the revolution's ideals. In "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807), he writes:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills.

Here, nature is portrayed as a companion in times of solitude. It offers peace and hope—concepts the revolution initially promised. Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" (1798) also reflects his belief that nature holds the power to heal and bring joy. He uses nature as a metaphor for freedom and renewal, ideals at the heart of the revolution.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)- Struggle and Mystery: The French Revolution's ideas inspired Samuel Taylor Coleridge. However, he also explored the darker and mysterious side of life. In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798), he writes about a sailor who goes on a long, difficult journey. This poem can be seen as a metaphor for the struggles people faced during the revolution. Coleridge writes:

Water, water, everywhere,

Nor any drop to drink.

This line reflects a sense of hardship and struggle, much like the revolution's fight for change. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" (1816) also reflects the Romantic interest in imagination and mystery, qualities inspired by the revolutionary spirit of change and freedom.

Lord Byron (1788-1824)- Critique of Society: Lord Byron was known for his rebellious nature. The French Revolution encouraged him to critique society's norms. In "Don Juan Canto I" (1819), Byron uses satire to mock the upper class and challenge the old order. He writes:

I want a hero: an uncommon want.

Byron's hero is not traditional and represents the individual's fight against a flawed society. The revolutionary spirit of fighting for change and justice is evident in his works, where Byron questions authority and champions personal freedom.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)- The Spirit of Change and Rebellion: Percy Bysshe Shelley was passionate about the revolution and believed in the power of change. In "Ode to the West Wind"(1820), Shelley compares the wind to a force of revolution:

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,

The West Wind symbolizes change and the destruction of old, oppressive systems, much like the revolution's fight for freedom. In "Ode to a Skylark" (1820), Shelley praises the bird as a symbol of unrestrained freedom, flying high above human concerns. His poetry signifies the spirit of rebellion and hope for a new world.

John Keats (1795-1821)- Beauty and Endurance: Though John Keats focused more on beauty and art, the influence of the French Revolution is present in his works. In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819), Keats reflects on the idea of eternal beauty and the passage of time. The urn represents a world untouched by the struggles of revolution, but Keats expresses a deep search for meaning. He writes:

Beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Although Keats does not directly mention the revolution, his search for beauty links to its ideas. He seeks something lasting in a world of change, much like the revolution sought something greater and eternal.

In conclusion, the French Revolution inspired Romantic poets to explore ideas of freedom, change, and beauty. Through their poetry, they expressed hope for a better world and questioned old systems of power and society. They even started new features for poetry that were different from the Neo-Classical Age (1660-1785).

LxNotes