

Hello students, today I will be discussing the first topic in the paper, entitled **Literary Criticism**. The first topic here is the **Preface to the Lyrical Ballads**. In this particular module, I will give you a background to the **Preface to the Lyrical Ballads**.

The outline of this module will cover the publication of the Lyrical Ballads, the characteristics of Neo Classical Poetry, Wordsworth's contemporary scene, characteristics of Romantic poetry, and the reason for the writing of the **Preface to Lyrical Ballads**.

At the end of the module, the student will understand the age of the writer and that of his predecessors. You will have an introduction to the writer's work. You will understand the differences between the poetry of the Romantic Age and that of the Neoclassical age, and you will have an understanding on why William Wordsworth wrote the **Preface**.

At the end of the course, of the paper titled Literary Criticism, you will also be able to identify and explain the major trends in literary critical thought. You will acquire skills of summarizing, critiquing reading, interpreting, and citing from the critics' interpretation, and you will be able to identify and explain concepts like point of view, plot and setting.

In the introduction, I would like to talk about the **Lyrical Ballads**. What exactly was the **Lyrical Ballads**?

**The Lyrical Ballads** was a collection of poems that was published by William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the year 1798. This is a major landmark in the history of the Romantic age because it marks the beginning of the Romantic Age. This collection of poems consisted of 23 poems in total, where 19 poems were written by William Wordsworth and four poems were contributed by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

**The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads** is considered a landmark essay in the history of English literature because it brings out very clearly the characteristics of the Romantic Age.

Before we can begin to discuss the preface, I would first like to look at the characteristics of the poetry of the Neoclassical Age. The Neo Classical Age starts from the year 1660 and ends in the year 1798.

During this period, we find that the poets turned to the classical writers for inspiration. This period laid immense emphasis on the revival of the classical spirit. It could be called a prototype of classicism. The writers endeavored to follow the footsteps of the writers of the period of Augustus, the Emperor of Rome, which had writers like Horace, Virgil and that is why this age is also known as the Augustan Age.

What we find with the writers of the Neo Classical Age is that they adhere to the rules and regulations that were laid down by the classical writers and laid a lot of a lot of stress on artistic finish. The writers of the neoclassical age pattern their writings on those of the classical writers and these writer's considered the classical writers their models.

The writers that we have in this age are John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Samuel Johnson. They followed each and every rule that was laid down by the classical writers. We also find that the poetry was urban-based. It was the intellectual poetry of the town and concentrated on the lords and ladies who

spent a lot of their time in the coffee houses of the time..The writers of this time also laid a lot of emphasis on intellect and reason. There was, there was no room given to imagination and expression of feelings. We also find that during this time the poetry was objective in nature and the writers of this time desired to use literature to teach. What we find also in the case of the poetry of this time, it was removed from everyday life and many of the readers found it difficult to identify with this poetry.

Now we will look at the Romantic age before we can look at the characteristics of the Romantic age. I would just like to cover three aspects which had a tremendous impact on the writers of the Romantic Age. One of the major events that took place during this time was the French Revolution, which took place in the year 1789. The French Revolution, with its battle cry of "Liberty, equality, and fraternity" had a tremendous impact on the writers of the time. They felt excited when they looked at all the happenings that were taking place in the countries of Europe. In fact, what was felt can be summarized in the statement 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven.'

We also find that the writers of this time were inspired by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jean Jacques Rousseau was a French writer and philosopher. He promoted the ideas of a return to nature and the importance of embracing one's emotions and the importance also of the individual expressing his views.

The Romantic Age also was a revolt against the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. The Industrial Revolution, which took place during this time, resulted in a massive migration of people to the urban areas for work and a better life and as a result the urban areas became crowded. There was a lack of housing and sanitation and the people of the time got fed up with living in the urban areas.

We will now look at the characteristics of Romantic poetry. The Romantic writers laid a lot of emphasis on the freedom of expression and originality. They decided that they would be free to choose the topics which they were going to write on, and since they did not pattern their works on any other writers.. Their work was original. They also laid a lot of emphasis on imagination and what resulted from this was that the ordinary things in life were made to look extraordinary. In fact, Wordsworth said that he would take the natural and make it supernatural with the use of imagination. While Samuel Taylor Coleridge would take the supernatural and make it look natural. During this time, we also find that the poets felt free to express their emotions, their feelings about life, their feelings about their relationships, their feelings of love, more freely expressed in their poetry. They also took a lot of interest in the common man and childhood, and that is why we have Wordsworth contributing poems like the *Solitary Reaper*. the *Lucy Poems*.

Their inspiration was based on country life, on nature and very often they turned to the medieval age for inspiration.

The preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* underwent a number of revisions. When the collection of poems was first published in the year 1798, we find that it was published without the **Preface**. However, it did have an advertisement in which he tried to explain what exactly he was trying to do with these poems. He stated that the poems were an experiment, and he wanted to see whether he could create a new taste amongst

the readers of the time.

In the 1800 edition of the poems. This edition had the preface added to it.

In 1802, the collection of the poems *Lyrical Ballads* also had the *Preface* along with an appendix on poetic diction that was added to it.

In 1815, again we had another edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* published, and this particular edition had an appendix, and we also find the Essay Supplementary added to it. So we see here that the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* underwent a lot of changes over the years.

What we have for study is the edition that was published in 1802.

Now, why did William Wordsworth write the Preface?

What did William Wordsworth hope to achieve through the *Preface*?

The reason why he wrote the *Preface* was to give justification to the new kind of poetry that was included in the collection of poems titled *Lyrical Ballads*. This poetry was totally different from that of the poetry of the Neoclassicists. He also wanted to show that there was a vast difference between the Neo-classical tradition of English poetry and that of the Romantic Age and. He explains in detail the function of poetry. In the *Preface* William Wordsworth also explains the process of poetic creation. He also goes into the details of the nature and the function of the poet.

What he really wanted to do through the *Preface* was to create and educate public taste so that they would finally be able to appreciate the new type of poetry that he and Samuel Taylor, Coleridge, and many of the other poets of the age were trying to write.

Thank you.