

First of all it is important to point out that Romanticism contrasted certain qualities of Neo-Classicism.

Neo-Classicism	Romanticism
Emphasis on reason	Emphasis on imagination
Stress on universal thoughts and ideas	Stress on individual thoughts and ideas
Admiration for classic culture (Greece and Rome)	Love for the strange, the distant, especially the Middle Ages
Preference for urban settings	Preference for natural settings
Use of sophisticated and ornate language Poetic diction: it employs words and figures not normally found in common speech or prose. In the 18 th century the principle of decorum required the use of periphrasis to avoid naming "common" things. For example Pope refers to a pair of scissors as "the glitt'ring Forfex". Poetic diction is also marked by Latinate vocabulary, archaisms, and frequent use of personification. According to the principle of decorum the poet must adapt the "level" and type of his diction to the mode and status of a particular genre. Therefore genres such as epic, tragedy, and ode required a refined and elevated poetic diction to raise the style to the level of the form. Prominent characteristics of 18 th century poetic diction were its archaism and its use of epithets; its preference for resounding words derived from Latin; the frequent invocations to abstractions and inanimate objects; the persistent use of circumlocution or periphrasis to avoid what were perceived as low or commonplace terms.	Use of language really spoken by men Wordsworth rejected poetic diction as "gaudy and inane phraseology". In the preface to the second edition (1800) of <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> he argues for a plainer diction closer to "the real language of men". On his attack on the neoclassic doctrine of special language for poetry, Wordsworth claimed that there is no "essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". He viewed the poetic diction of the 18 th century as "artificial", "vicious", and "unnatural". A valid poetic language is not a matter of artful contrivance, but the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Going against the class-hierarchy of linguistic decorum, he claimed that the best model for the natural expression of feeling is not upper-class speech, but the speech of "humble and rustic life."

Romantic characteristics:

1. Sensibility (opposed to rationalism): feelings guide us to truth
2. Primitivism: primitive people remained closer to nature and had been less subject to the influences of society. Consequently the best poetry should be natural or instinctive
3. Love for nature
4. Sympathetic interest in the past, especially the medieval (Gothic. Neoclassicists considered gothic elements as "barbaric", as an offence to their classic tastes. The Romanticists looked with favour upon the Gothic, To them it suggested whatever was medieval, natural, primitive, free, authentic. For this reason they praised Shakespeare and Spenser)
5. Mysticism: the knowledge of God is attainable through the use of some human faculty that transcends intellect and does not use ordinary human perceptions
6. Individualism
7. Reaction against whatever characterised Neo-Classicism
8. Abandonment of the heroic couplet in favour of blank verse
9. Dropping of the conventional poetic diction in favour of fresher language
10. The idealisation of rural life

11. Enthusiasm for the wild, irregular, or grotesque in nature
12. Unrestrained imagination
13. Enthusiasm for the uncivilised or "natural"
14. Interest in human rights (Burns, Byron)
15. Faith in the individual and in freedom from rules, systems or from rationalism

THE INDIVIDUAL IS AT THE VERY CENTRE OF ALL LIFE AND ALL EXPERIENCE. LITERATURE IS THE EXPRESSION OF HIS OR HER UNIQUE FEELINGS AND PARTICULAR ATTITUDES. GREAT EMPHASIS IS PLACED ON THE CREATIVE FUNCTION OF THE IMAGINATION. NATURE IS SEEN AS THE REVELATION OF TRUTH, "THE LIVING GARMENT OF GOD" (PANTHEISM)

By employing the commonplace, the natural, the simple as its materials, Romanticism seeks always to find the Absolute, the Ideal, by transcending the actual (unlike Romanticism realism finds its values in the actual).

Wordsworth's ideas about poetry. (See extract from "Preface" to "Lyrical Ballads")

SUBJECT MATTER OF POETRY

Poetry should deal with incidents and situations from simple rustic life, transfigured by imagination and reflecting the way people think in a state of excitement.

Reason: the preference for humble rustic life follows from the assumption that men are better when closer to nature, far from artificialities of civilization.

POETIC DICTION

Poetry should use familiar, simple language – the language of men in the middle and lower classes.

Reason: humble country people live in communion with the objects from which language originates and voice their feelings in a more immediate, forceful way.

THE POET'S IDENTITY

The poet is a man speaking to other men who has:

- acute awareness of physical sensations and a marked capacity for rejoicing in life;
- profound understanding of human nature;
- a more powerful imagination;
- capacity to articulate his sensations and thoughts.

THE CREATIVE ACT OF THE POET

The creative process starts from an emotion which is recollected in tranquillity, recreated and enjoyed by the poet and shared by the reader.

The emotion is subjective, rooted in personal experience, not divorced from thinking or meditation.

Plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*

	Coleridge	Wordsworth
Subject	Supernatural persons and characters	Things of every day
Aim	To give them a semblance of truth	To give them the charm of novelty
By means of	That willing suspension of disbelief which is poetic faith	Directing the mind's attention to the loveliness and wonders of the world

THE SUBLIME

The concept came from French and reached its definitive explication in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757-59). This text displays an emphasis on feelings and on imagination, which is almost the antithesis of the neoclassical insistence on form and reason. Burke's idea of the sublime goes beyond natural beauty and goes into the realms of awe, or 'terror'. The sublime is for Burke "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling". Terror, emotion, feeling represent a break from the rigours of the Augustan age.