

Recent University Questions with Answers

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1. Write an essay on the age of Gray. How far is the age reflected in his poetry?

Or

What are the chief literary characteristics of the age of Gray. Illustrate your answer from the poems you have read?

Or

Write a note on the "dual tendencies" of the age. How far is the poetry of the period influenced by these trends.

Or

"The age of Gray is an age of transition in which we see the decline of the pseudo-classical school and the rise of the new romantic school." Justify.

The age of Gray—the later half of the 18th century—is an age of reaction an age of transition, an age in which there is a marked conflict between the old and the new. The men of Pope's time made reason and good sense their guides, cared for form and expression and distrusted emotion and enthusiasm. In the age of Gray, there is a re-action against the self complacency, the artificiality, the formalism and intellectuality of the previous age. It is realised that reason alone is not enough. There is a re-awakening of feeling, an awakening to the wonder and mystery of the world around.

This rise of feeling or sensibility is best illustrated in the case of religion. The preachers no longer tried to convince by appealing to the reason, rather they tried to move by appealing to the emotions. They no longer cared for propriety and correctness: rather they preached with impassioned tones and gestures.

This awakening of feeling takes various forms. It is reflected in the novels of Richardson and Laurence Stern. It is seen in the revived love of nature, and of those who live in the lap of nature. The Gothic novel or the novel of terror is yet another form of this sensibility. It is seen in the love of, and faith in, the supernatural. It is seen in the feeling for old ruins and monuments. It is seen in a love of the magic and mystery of the middle ages and the appreciation of the simplicity of medieval ballads. It is seen in the love of beauty of all kinds. As the century advances faith in reason is replaced by faith in feeling and emotion. This awakened sensibility manifests itself in literature, and the rise of romanticism is the consequence.

might have spoken out freely and frankly in his letters, but there is no denying Gray's sterility as far as his poetry is concerned. His poetic fame rests entirely on a small volume of poetry. As Dickens puts it, "No poet ever gained a place among the immortals with so small all a volume under his arms." What are the reasons for this scantiness of Gray's poetry?

Gray's barrenness, the fact that he 'never spoke out' in poetry, cannot be explained away by any one factor, but results from a number of factors. For one thing, Gray was a leisured gentleman who had enough to live upon and did not have to depend on his earnings. He did never write for money, and so he did never care to write abundantly. He wrote for his own pleasure, and so composed only when the mood was upon him.

Moreover, he led the life of retired scholar and as such was entirely, "To censure cold and negligent of fame." Fame might be the last infirmity of a noble mind, but Gray at least did not care much for it. He wrote only for his amusement and for the pleasure of his friends, and it was only when pressed by them, or by the publishers, that he published anything. The *Elegy*, for example, was circulated in manuscript for months, and Gray agreed to its publication only when it was about to be printed in an unauthorised manner. Even then he did not give his name to it, it was first published anonymously. Obviously, one cannot expect over much from such a temper.

Thirdly, Gray was a profound scholar, in the true sense of the word, and as such he aimed at perfection and was over-critical of his own production. The scholar's passion for minute, scholarly research, his too many and varied intellectual interests, his unbounded curiosity, all came in the way of the poet. Gray could not be a prolific poet, because he was too profound a scholar. The ideal, 'extreme conciseness of expression, pure, perspicuous and musical,' which Gray aimed at is difficult of achievement. According to Dr. Johnson, "He laboured every line as it arose in the train of composition," and according to O. Elton, "He distrusted himself, cherished a high ideal of perfection, and was not satisfied with his work."

The matters were made worse still by ill-health and low spirits, which dogged his footsteps all his life. "Melancholy marked him as his own" quite early in life. "He suffered from inherited gout, the diseased increase with years, disabled him and sapped away his energies." The result was that Gray, "finely endowed though he was, richly stored with knowledge though he was yet produced so little, found no full and sufficient utterance." "He never spoke out, "As a result of ill-health, his sensibility withered and dried out.

But ill-health alone cannot account for the small quantity of Gray's poetry. Spirit can do much even when the body is weak and ill. Pope pathetically called his life, "a long disease," and yet he could produce

abundantly. Matthew Arnold hits the nail on the head, when he says that the scantiness of Gray's poetry, results from the fact that he, "A born poet, fell upon an age of prose." Gray was out of sympathy with his age. It was an age of prose and reason, an age which emphasised and developed the powers of understanding, reasoning, wit and intellect and not the true poetic qualities of emotion and imagination. Even poetry in this age had the qualities of prose: it was intellectual and argumentative in tone. Gray with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet was isolated in his age. He was a man born out of date. The want of a genial atmosphere, the want of sympathy and understanding in his contemporaries was too much for him. A sort of spiritual east wind was at that time blowing, and Gray could not grow and come to flower. As Matthew Arnold admirably puts it, "Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man, born in the same year with Burns he would have been another man." Gray fell on barren soil and could not thrive.

Gray could not help catching some of the faults of his age. The poetic language perfected by Pope is really at the root of his own. The leading features of the Pseudo-classic, poetic diction mark his own poetic style. He cared much for formal excellence, lucidity and perfection, and this classic temper came in the way of free and unrepressed expression of emotion and imagination. He was more in harmony with the rising school of Romanticism, but the dead hand of the past suppressed him and kept him down. He failed to shake off the chains of the past. ●

4. Write a note on Gray as a transitional poet. What are these transitional elements?

Or

"Gray is the greatest of the Pre-romantics." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

Or

How far is it correct to say that Gray was a precursor of the romantic movement? Illustrate your answer from the poems you have read.

Or

Bring out the classical elements in the poetry of Gray.

Or

Gray was a romantic in an age of Classicism." Elucidate. What is its impact on his poetry.

The period 1730-70 marks the beginning of a movement from one distinct school or convention of English poetry towards another. To the first the epithet Pseudo Classical is usually applied and to the second the epithet