

The Characteristics of Pre-Raphaelite Poetry.

The Pre-Raphaelites were a loose and baggy collective of Victorian poets, painters, illustrators and designers whose tenure lasted from 1848 to roughly the turn of the century. Drawing inspiration from visual art and literature, their work privileged atmosphere and mood over narrative, focusing on medieval subjects, artistic introspection, female beauty, sexual yearning and altered states of consciousness. In defiant opposition to the utilitarian ethos that formed the dominant ideology of the mid-century, the Pre-Raphaelites helped to popularise the notion of 'art for art's sake'. Generally devoid of the political edge that characterised much Victorian art and literature, Pre-Raphaelite work nevertheless incorporated elements of 19th-century realism in its attention to detail and in its close observation of the natural world. Those poets who had some connection with these artists and whose work presumably shares the characteristics of their art include Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, George Meredith, William Morris, and Algernon Charles Swinburne. They were inspired by Italian art of the 14th and 15th centuries, and their adoption of the name Pre-Raphaelite expressed their admiration for what they saw as the direct and uncomplicated depiction of nature typical of Italian painting before the High Renaissance and, particularly, before the time of Raphael.

The Pre-Raphaelite movement during the Victorian era was an idealistic reaction against the didacticism moral fervor, and pre-occupation of poets and novelists with contemporary society. In the reign of Queen Victoria there was a growing tendency to make literature a handmaiden social reform and an instrument for the propagation of moral and spiritual ideas. Literature became the vehicle of social, political, and moral problems confronting the Victorian age. Ruskin, Carlyle, Dickens were engaged in attacking the evils rampant in the society of their times. So the movement was against these pre-occupation of poets, prose writers, and novelists with the mundane problems of their times, that a set of high souled artists formed this group.

The first characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Poetry is that it was a revolt and reaction against the conventionality of poetry represented by Tennyson. The poets of this school revolted against the harshening use of poetry to the service of social and political problems of the age.

Tennyson concentrated on social, religious, and political life of the age. It was against this age bound poetry that the Pre-Raphaelite raised their revolt and *introduced the new standard of the glorification of art rather than the glorification of fleeting and temporary values of mundane life.*

The second characteristics is that the Pre-Raphaelites above all, were artists and their poeries were artistic creation. Art was their religion. They were the votaries of *art for art's sake.* The poetry of this movement had no morality to preach and no reforms to introduce to the correctness of societal life. Life of beauty was their creed, and if in glorifying beauty they had to be sensuous, the feared not the charges of the moralists and orthodox puritans. D. G. Rossetti's sonnets in *The House of Life* signalise love in its glory as well as desolation. He combines spiritual and sensuous aspects of love in his sonnets. The poets aimed both in poetry and painting at perfect form and finish.

The third characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Poetry is that the poets, to escape from the darkness and ugliness of contemporary society, the turned their eyes to the good old days of medievalism when chivalry and knighthood, adventure and heroism were in the air. D. G. Rossetti was the hero of this return back to medievalism for poetic inspiration. His poems *The Blessed Damozel* (1850) and *Sister Helen* (1853) are medieval in outlook and form. *The Blessed Damozel* is equally inspired by *The Divine Comedy* by Dante. The other members of the school Hunt and Millais were a little skeptical of the medieval tradition. There is also a note of love for the Middle Ages in Christina Rossetti's poems. Her *Goblin Market* (1862) is steeped in medievalism and supernaturalism. The poem tells the story of Laura and Lizzie who are tempted with fruit by goblin merchants, who resembles animals with faces like wombats or cats and with tails.

The fourth characteristic of Pre-Raphaelite Poetry is that this poetry reviving the Biblical theme, we can see it in the poem of Christina Rossetti's 'Eve' (1864) which deals with the theme of repent and sadness. The poem set in the Biblical era. It dates back to the time after the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. This poem is Christina Rossetti's attempts show to show the anguish and pain felt by Eve after she was banished from the Garden of Eden because of the sin she committed. The poem 'Eve' shows Christina's intellectual abilities and her deep knowledge in Catholic beliefs.

The fifth characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite Poetry is that the poets of this school use metaphors to express their feelings. Christina Rossetti's poem 'A Sketch' uses metaphor in the lines:

The blindest buzzard that I know

In other points our friend's a mole.

In the poem she talks about her friend, terming him as 'buzzard' and 'mole'.

The Pre-Raphaelite Poetry's characteristics are very rich and very vast. It focuses on the glorification of art, escape from the darkness, and the ugliness of contemporary society, continuation of Romantic poetry, and gives a strong conception of scenes and situation, precise delineation, lavish imagery and metaphor. By these characteristics, the Pre-Raphaelite Poetry leaves a lasting impression in the English Literature.