

Romantic Criticism: General Characteristics The Rise of Romantic Criticism The awakening of sensibility is the most radical change that comes over the English literary scene about the middle of the 18th century. Sensibility, in its various manifestations, was the contemporary expression of what Johnson called, "that hunger of the imagination which preys incessantly on life". This awakening of sensibility accounts for the change that comes both over literature and literary inquiry in the later half of the 18th century. The neo-classical dogma is felt to be too cramping and narrow, and writers turn to a freer mode of self-expression. Its Causes Love of Liberty is ingrained in the English temperament. Hence it is that the English could not servilely follow for any length of time the neo-classical rules. Englishmen are too individualistic for any slavish imitation. As under current of liberalism is noticeable even at a time when neo-classicism was at its height. This temperamental leaning towards liberalism was fed and nourished by Longinus whose essay, "On The Sublime", had been Rationalism which had prevailed during the Augustan era, and the order, discipline, and respect for tradition and authority which the Augustans had inculcated, no longer satisfied. Reason had failed to answer the fundamental questions about the mystery of life, and so stress shifted to emotion and imagination as safer guides to truth.