

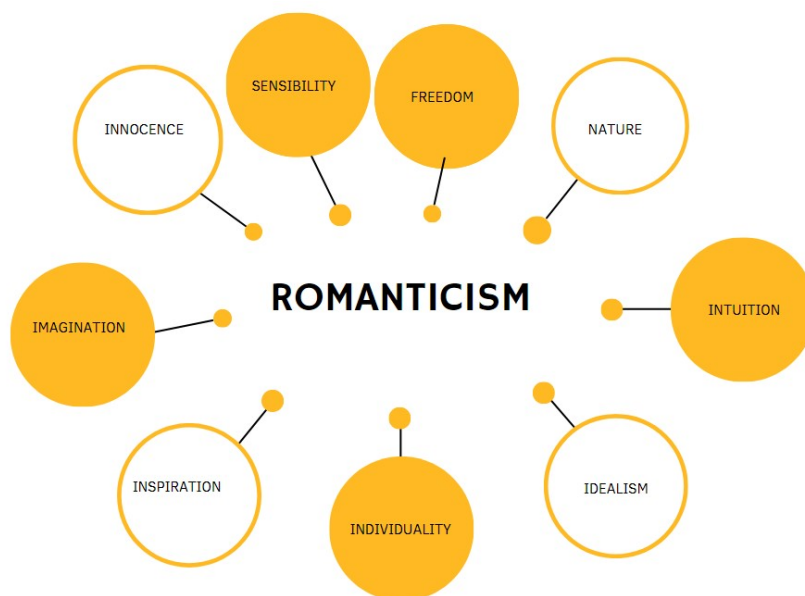
Lecture 1: Romanticism in Great Britain

Introduction

Romanticism is a philosophical and artistic movement that appeared in the early eighteenth century in Europe and which has come as a reaction against rationalism. It rejected the technology-oriented world of the enlightenment and the industrial age because it destroyed the primitive, simplistic lifestyle that Man could enjoy before. Moreover, the obsession with rationalism made it impossible for individuals to express their emotions and sensitivity, based on the argument that abstract things and feelings are superstitious and irrational. Reason's concern with calculability and concrete concepts had led society to become selfish and inhumane, especially with the spread of poverty and crime in industrial cities as a consequence of the creation of the machine.

Romanticism sought to give freedom and value to emotions, sensitivity, and imagination. It revolted against the power and hegemony of the rational thought, which imposed prose writing over the poem, rational thinking, even in marriage, instead of emotion.

Main Concepts



Main Influences

The ideas of the French philosophers before and during the French revolution influenced the British poets who later attempted to take the revolution to Britain. The first philosopher they were influenced by was Jean Jacques Rousseau who argued that, unlike the rational Cogito thinking, feeling precedes thought in human life, and to feel is to exist. The Romantics believed in the importance of intuition and the purity of the human soul. Thus, by following feeling and intuition, man is able to make the right choices (without the interference of external ideological influence which is man-made).

The American Revolution inspired new ideas of equality and liberty in Europe and they are values the Romantics wanted to spread in Great Britain as well because Romanticism was a revolution against authority and hierarchy. Denis Diderot and Rousseau believed that control and authority are repressive and thought that man needs freedom. Rousseau argued that Man is born free but everywhere he is in the chains of civilization. The Civilized man is born and dies a slave of authority, civilization, and the rational world which obliges him to conform to man-made rules. Civilization is approached as wicked because it is taunted by the power of science and of rationality.

Romanticism revolted against Industry, commerce, rationality, science, the new technology-oriented world, and the repressive organized lifestyle of the modern world.

Major Figures : There are **two** generations. They co-lived within the same period of time, yet, each had their own interests and thoughts:

First Generation Romantics: They are known as the Lake poets because they originate from Lake District. They were against change, wanted a return to poetry, imagination and legend. (Nostalgia for the past) They wanted a return to the magical and Mysterious.

- **William Blake:** Imagination is the source of art. He sought freedom: he thought the system enslaved him. He chose poetry and painting to express his uncommon ideas. He had a grief for children who had to work . Blake

wrote *The Chimney Sweeper*, He thought that spontaneous childhood visions are the source of adult Inspiration, Innocence is a source of creativity and genius

- **William Wordsworth** (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850): He was a poet of freedom. He thought that the revolution promised freedom for the future of humanity. After the French revolution he commented: “Human nature seems born again”. He became wanderer in search of peace. Landscape restored his faith in **human nature**. He wrote Poetry about human passions, Celebrated nature (daffodils, oak trees, rivers, butterflies...). Hated anything mechanical and industrial. Preferred simplicity and nature rather than industry. In Bristol he wrote poetry with Samuel Taylor Coleridge

- **Wordsworth and Coleridge** wrote together *The Lyrical Ballads* 1798-1800, A collection of poems considered as the bible of Romanticism for it contains its main principles. They wrote with the same purposes of the French revolution. People cease to be subjects and become citizens . Topics were the same as earlier poetry (rural poor, beggars, deserted mothers) but what made it different was its depth of moral and psychological complexity

- **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**: He gave lectures on Revolution after the French Revolution. He wrote *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in which a voyager shoots an Albatross and his ship is followed by ghosts, a warning that man should respect other creatures. Through this poem, the search of freedom led Romantics to the Natural world. Coleridge explored the limits of human imagination which inspired him *Kubla Khan* (1797) the experience of the exotic –Opium— For Coleridge, Mind is a mystery discovered through imagination

The Second Generation Romantics: They defied the standards of society, revolted against and transgressed the laws. They sought to give meaning to life . They were self-sufficient and individualistic. Their poetry was self regarding and subjective. They were enveloped in passion and emotion, incorporating so much more intuitive thought, the supernatural, the exotic. Sought satisfaction and made it unreachable.

- **John Keats**: Wrote people’s pain in poetry . A poet is a sage, humanist physician to all men. (words are medicine). H

- **P. B. Shelley:** Sought the meaning of life and claimed that it was found in Atheism. Had different love affairs, sought self gratification. By violating social conventions, Shelley pioneered a notion of Free Love. He was driven by Individual will and feeling
- **Lord Byron:** The great object of life is sensation. In 1812 he wrote *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* a poem of a wanderer looking for an exotic experience. Impossibility of satisfaction. The Desire for extreme experience, Heightened sensation
- **Mary Shelley :** She was a poet and Novelist, daughter of philosopher and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and politician William Godwin. She Wrote *Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus*. She wrote Gothic stories of ghosts and beasts, supernatural, mystery, antiquity, and the Fear of the supernatural

The Five Is of Romanticism

- Innocence and youth: youth is not corrupted thus free from the evils of society
- Imagination: a source of information which deserves exploration
- Inspiration: by nature. Nature is more valuable than towns and cities. People are free from judgement and from negative influences
- Intuition: inner voice
- Individualism: there is a divine spark in every human being

Suggestions for Further Reading

Wordsworth, William, Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems*. London: Wordsworth Editions, 2003. Print.

BBC. "The Romantics – Nature (BBC documentary)" *Youtube*, Uploaded by Philosophical Mindz 05 Avril 2014
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=liVQ21KZfOI&t=1s>

BBC. "The Romantics – Liberty (BBC documentary)" *Youtube*, Uploaded by Philosophical Mindz 09 Avril 2014
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLwRXlSgiSQ>

BBC. "The Romantics – Eternity (BBC documentary)" *Youtube*, Uploaded by Philosophical Mindz 05 Avril 2014
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R6mefXs5h9o>

"History of Romanticism" *Youtube*, Uploaded by The School of Life 13 February 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiRWBI0JTYQ>

Assignments

1. Read the novel *Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley and prepare the complete literary analysis as already shown to you.

2. Read the poems "Chimney Sweeper" by William Blake, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" by William Wordsworth, "Love's Philosophy" by Percy Bysshe Shelley, and extract the principles of Romanticism that you can find in each of them