

The Study of Literary Texts

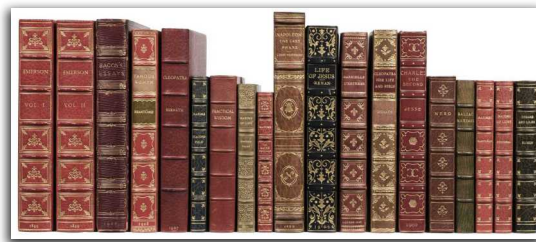
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0.1 March 2025



The Study of Literary Texts
Second Year Bachelor Degree

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Unit 03: Romanticism In Great Britain



1. Theoretical Conception

Lecture Outline

- The lecture introduces Romanticism as a new literary movement as well as its principles. Through the **theoretical** lecture, the students learn the importance of the movement in opposition to the prevalent culture of rationalism and its implications on society.
- The lecture includes a thorough study of the basic **influences**, leading **figures** of Romanticism in Great Britain with focus on the writing **style** of each.
- The theoretical lecture is followed by a **study** of romantic selected poems covering different themes all belonging to the romantic drive.
- The lecture also covers a study and analysis of the novel Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley as an example of **Gothic literature**.

Specific Objectives



Fondamental

The objectives of studying Romanticism are to:

- Understand this literary and philosophical movement.
- Identify its particular principles.
- Contrast this movement with other literary trends.
- Explore romanticist works and their authors.
- Argue why a literary work is romanticist.



Définition

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 of the enlightenment. It 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, as well as rational thinking even in marriage, instead of emotion.

Main Principles

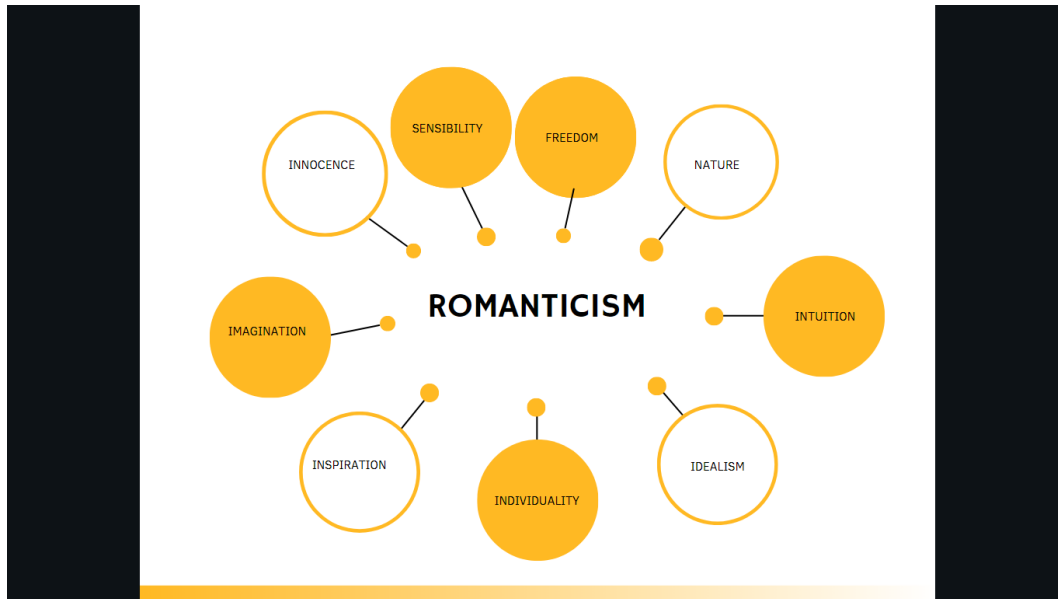


Fondamental

Romanticism emphasized some notions or principles that were in opposition to the principles advocated by the enlightenment previously. These principles include mostly what are known as the five Is:

- 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: the inner voice
- Individualism: there is a divine spark in every human being

*Romantic Principles*

Main Influences

- French Philosopher such as Jean Jacques Rousseau.
- The French Revolution
- The American Revolution

[cf. The influence of the French philosophy and Revolution on Romanticism in Britain]

Main Figures



First Generation Romantics: 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. They included poets such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and William Blake.

The Second Generation Romantics: 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. They included authors the likes of John Keats, Lord Byron, Mary and P. B. Shelley.

2. Practical Part I: Poems

Steps to follow



- Read the poem.
- Break down the structure.
- Determine the form of the poem
- Study the language in the poem.
- Study the content of the poem.
- Determine who the narrator is.

- Paraphrase the poem line by line.
- Determine the themes of the poem and link them to the principles of Romanticism.

The Analysis of William Wordsworth's "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1807)

? *Exemple*



William Wordsworth

I wandered lonely as a cloud
 That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
 When all at once I saw a crowd,
 A host, of golden daffodils;
 Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
 Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
 Continuous as the stars that shine
 And twinkle on the milky way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
 The waves beside them danced; but they
 Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
 A poet could not but be gay,
 In such a jocund company:
 I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
 What wealth the show to me had brought:
 For oft, when on my couch I lie
 In vacant or in pensive mood,
 They flash upon that inward eye
 Which is the bliss of solitude;
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils.

Important Points



- The poem under analysis is an expression of **admiration to nature**. It includes a number of references to principles of Romanticism.
- In the first stanza the speaker **compares** himself to a cloud and indicates that his position is in the sky, on top of all other creatures.
- In the second stanza the speaker **describes** the daffodils along the bay of the lake.
- In the third stanza the speaker **muses** at the beauty of the daffodils, which are more glittering than the waves of the lake, then he expresses his extreme happiness to be in "such a jocund company".

The Analysis of "Chimney Sweeper" by William Blake (1789).



William Blake

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.
There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved, so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."
And so he was quiet, & that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, & Jack,
Were all of them locked up in coffins of black;
And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he opened the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain, leaping, laughing they run,
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.
Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark
 And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
 Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
 So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

Important Points



Fondamental

- William Blake wrote poetry against **child labour**. He thought that this phenomenon was one of the biggest atrocities of **industrialization**. For him, a child who has to work grows into a corrupted adult. The poem in hand is presented in the voice of a little boy who cleans chimneys with other children.
- The two first stanzas show the struggles and pains of the **children** who were living away from their families, often orphans and **exploited**.
- The third stanza highlights the principle of **imagination** using the dream to compare the chimney to a black coffin that brings death to the children.
- The **landscape** also represents **freedom** and escape from the industrial city where the children have to clean chimneys.

3. Practical Part II: Gothic Literature

what is Gothicism?



Définition



It emerged as a writing style in the mid-eighteenth century with the rise of the romantic belief that the Enlightenment was unable to reflect human complexity through rationalism. It is thus a form of **romantic** literature that is **characterized** by pessimism, mystery, and macabre. In the Gothic texts, there are constant references to the old and archaic past.

Some Features



Fondamental

- This genre covers narratives about strange and supernatural creatures, including pessimist stories of ghosts, beasts, ghoulish brides, and monsters.
- These narratives share the elements of fear, horror, and darkness, in addition to the reflection of the evil side of the human being and depictions of disgusting and grotesque figures and details.
- Gothic writing was used by authors like S.T Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Byron to show how **irrationality** could **criticize** the rational experience because feelings of fear and transgression affect humans more than optimistic situations.

- The Gothic text includes special **settings**, like castles, monasteries, and ruins. The **characters** are also peculiar too, they are often religious (nuns, monks), and aristocratic. They represent evil, terror, and are **anti-enlightenment** themes. Other aspects of the Gothic text include **grotesque** and **ugly** figures, **disgust**, and the **supernatural**.

Frankenstein, Or Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley

? *Exemple*



- The novel **Frankenstein, or Modern Prometheus** is a Gothic Romantic novel that reflects the fears and warnings of the nineteenth century romantics to the advocates of rationality about the danger of glorifying science. Science was thought to be very powerful and to be able to replace God. The author acts upon her drives as a romantic writer and as an agent whose mission is to warn society, stages a conflict of man against God wherein the scientific experiment ends in a failure and agony as a punishment to the man who run the experiment. His punishment included total anxiety until his death (as a response from God for his defiance).
- The novel was classified as a **science-fiction** novel because it includes a **scientific** experiment and **traumatic** results. Yet, the term science fiction (scienti-fiction) was only coined in 1920 while the novel was written in 1818. The novelist's tendency was **romantic** and may have common themes that merge with the modern age science fiction themes, like the defiance of God, the definition and power of science during the nineteenth century, and the fear of the future of humanity.

[cf. Frankenstein Animated]

4. Exercice : Test Acquisition.

How is Gothicism part of romanticism?