

Unit : Literary Romanticism

In all things of nature there is something marvellous

Aristotle

Definition : Romanticism refers to a new set of ideas that began in Western Europe in the second half of the 18th century in the works of artists, poets and philosophers. It subsequently spread all over the world changing the way (shift in the consciousness) people look at nature and other issues.

Historical background and roots

There are several reasons for the growth of the Romantic Movement in English literature in the early 19th century :

- 1- A revolt against the neoclassical movement and its confinement to the scientific rationalization of nature and its radical objectivity which neglected the non-physical world.
- 2- Revival of interest in ancient English poetic forms and folk poetry.
- 3- A new emphasis on the beauty and value of nature ; on emotion over reason ; and on the individual over institutions like the church and state.
- 4- Influence of the Gothic novel, novel of sensibility and graveyard poets of the 18th-century, whose works are characterized by their gloomy meditations on mortality, "skulls and coffins, epitaphs and worms" in the context of the graveyard.
- 5- The changing landscape and the pollution of the environment, brought about by the industrial and agricultural revolutions, with the expansion of the city.
- 6- Social changes, such as depopulation of the countryside and the rapid development of overcrowded industrial cities that took place in the period between 1750 and 1850.

2. Romanticism (1798–1837)

Romanticism is an artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in Europe. Most commonly the publishing of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 is taken as the beginning, and the crowning of Queen Victoria in 1837 as its end. The writers of this period, however, did not think of themselves as 'Romantics'. The landscape is often prominent in the poetry of this period, so that the Romantics are often described as 'nature poets'. Notable English Romantic writers include : William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jane Austen, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats and Lord Byron.

Characteristics of Romanticism :

- 1-Respect of nature as a resource for inspiration and as a means to achieve harmony
- 2-Predominance of emotion over reason and of the senses and intuition over the intellect (subjectivity)
- 3- Importance of individuality and of self-expression (subjectivity and originality)
- 4- Power of imagination and spontaneity which promote creative vision for the artist.
- 5-Unusual settings with magical or mythic elements
- 6-Supernaturalism in the depiction of the setting and the characters
- 7-Focus on the spiritual and moral development supported by Christian symbolism

Themes and concerns :

Faith, integrity, sacrifice, sincerity
The interaction between man and nature
Psychological effects of guilt and sin
An interest in the world of dreams and the non-physical world such as God, the soul, spirits and the afterlife.

Gothicism

For some Romantic writers, the imagination led to the threshold of the unknown; the shadowy region where the fantastic, the demonic and the insane reside. When the Gothic's saw the individual, they saw the potential of evil. So, Gothic literature developed out of Romanticism and is a subgenre. It focused on dark characteristics, mainly death, horror, and ruin. It began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Writers that represent this subgenre include : Horace Walpole, Catherine Morland and Mary Shelley, among others.