



XIX CENTURY ENGLISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to delve into the essence of Romanticism within 19th-century English literature, exploring its multifaceted nature through the examination of prevalent themes, literary techniques, and the socio-political influences that shaped the movement. The study encompasses a comprehensive analysis of prominent works and authors, shedding light on the profound impact of Romantic ideals on the literary landscape of the time. By dissecting the works of seminal figures such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats, among others, this thesis seeks to unravel the complexities of Romantic literature, highlighting its enduring relevance and contribution to the literary canon.

Keywords: Romanticism, 19th century, english literature, themes, literary, techniques, socio-political context, individualism, nature

INTRODUCTION

The 19th century in England witnessed a literary revolution marked by the emergence of Romanticism—a movement characterized by a profound shift in artistic expression, encompassing a rejection of classical conventions in favor of individualism, emotion, and a deep connection with nature. This period gave rise to a plethora of literary masterpieces that continue to captivate readers and scholars alike, serving as a testament to the enduring influence of Romantic ideals. This thesis endeavors to explore the essence of Romanticism within English literature of the time, examining its thematic preoccupations, innovative literary techniques, and the socio-political backdrop against which it flourished.

Origins and Characteristics of English Romantic Literature

Provides an overview of the historical and philosophical underpinnings of Romanticism, tracing its roots to the intellectual currents of the late 18th century and its subsequent evolution in England. It explores the key characteristics of Romantic literature, including a celebration of nature, an emphasis on individual experience and



emotion, a fascination with the supernatural, and a critique of industrialization and urbanization.

Themes in Romantic Literature

Delving deeper into the thematic concerns of Romantic literature, this chapter examines recurring motifs such as the sublime, the imagination, the quest for transcendence, and the exploration of the self. Through close readings of seminal works, including Wordsworth's "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," it elucidates how these themes are manifested and interwoven within the fabric of Romantic texts.

Literary Techniques and Innovations

Explores the innovative literary techniques employed by Romantic writers to convey their vision and aesthetic sensibilities. From the use of vivid imagery and symbolism to experimentation with narrative structures and poetic forms, this section analyzes how these techniques contribute to the distinctiveness and enduring appeal of Romantic literature.

Socio-Political Context and Influence

Romantic literature within its socio-political context, examining the ways in which the movement responded to and was shaped by the turbulent events of the time, including the French Revolution, the rise of industrial capitalism, and the Napoleonic Wars. It also explores the influence of Romanticism on other artistic forms and its lasting legacy in shaping the cultural landscape of the 19th century and beyond.

I have long thought that literature by the English Romantics is among the most beautiful written in the English language; this body of literature was probably my first serious literary love. Poets of this era turned to intensely personal experiences with Nature to develop their beliefs about life and to elevate and assuage their struggles. The resulting works contain line after line of beautiful natural description for readers to revel in, even before starting to think about deeper meanings.

The emphasis on feeling—seen perhaps at its finest in the poems of Robert Burns—was in some ways a continuation of the earlier “cult of sensibility”; and it is worth remembering that Alexander Pope praised his father as having known no language but the language of the heart. But feeling had begun to receive particular emphasis and is found in most of the Romantic definitions of poetry. Wordsworth called poetry “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling,” and in 1833 John Stuart Mill defined poetry as “feeling itself, employing thought only as the medium of its utterance.” It followed that the best poetry was that in which the greatest intensity of feeling was expressed, and hence a new importance was attached to the lyric. Another key quality of Romantic



writing was its shift from the mimetic, or imitative, assumptions of the Neoclassical era to a new stress on imagination. Samuel Taylor Coleridge saw the imagination as the supreme poetic quality, a quasi-divine creative force that made the poet a godlike being. Samuel Johnson had seen the components of poetry as “invention, imagination and judgement,” but Blake wrote: “One Power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, the Divine Vision.” The poets of this period accordingly placed great emphasis on the workings of the unconscious mind, on dreams and reveries, on the supernatural, and on the childlike or primitive view of the world, this last being regarded as valuable because its clarity and intensity had not been overlaid by the restrictions of civilized “reason.” Rousseau’s sentimental conception of the “noble savage” was often invoked, and often by those who were ignorant that the phrase is Dryden’s or that the type was adumbrated in the “poor Indian” of Pope’s *An Essay on Man*. A further sign of the diminished stress placed on judgment is the Romantic attitude to form: if poetry must be spontaneous, sincere, intense, it should be fashioned primarily according to the dictates of the creative imagination. Wordsworth advised a young poet, “You feel strongly; trust to those feelings, and your poem will take its shape and proportions as a tree does from the vital principle that actuates it.” This organic view of poetry is opposed to the classical theory of “genres,” each with its own linguistic decorum; and it led to the feeling that poetic sublimity was unattainable except in short passages.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this thesis argues that English Romantic literature represents a transformative moment in literary history, characterized by its profound engagement with the human condition, its celebration of the individual imagination, and its critique of societal norms and conventions. By elucidating the thematic concerns, literary techniques, and socio-political influences of the movement, this study seeks to underscore the enduring relevance and significance of Romanticism within the broader literary tradition.

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