

STUDY OF THE PHENOMENON OF LOVE IN 20TH CENTURY ENGLISH LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The release of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s Lyrical Ballads and the passing of author Sir Walter Scott are considered the beginning and conclusion of the Romantic Period in English literature, respectively. A longer time period was covered by the historical and literary backgrounds and impacts. In this article, there are given main information about love in 20th century.

Keywords: love, literature, English language, romanticism, Neoclassicism.

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The Romantic Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has more diversity in style, theme, and content than any other period in English literature. Furthermore, no time has ever been the subject of such controversy and misunderstanding regarding the guiding ideals and aesthetics.

In England, Romanticism had its greatest influence from the end of the eighteenth century up to 1832, all the way up to about 1870. Its primary vehicle of expression was

in poetry. Because the expression Romanticism is a phenomenon of immense scope, embracing as it does, literature, politics, history, philosophy and the arts in general, there has never been much agreement and much confusion as to what the word means. It has, in fact, been used in so many different ways that some scholars have argued that the best thing we could do with the expression is to abandon it once and for all. However, the phenomenon of Romanticism would not become less complex by simply throwing away its label of convenience.

Romanticism is a movement in art and literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in revolt against the Neoclassicism of the previous centuries. The German poet Friedrich Schlegel, who is given credit for first using the term romantic to describe literature, defined it as "literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form." Imagination, emotion, and freedom are certainly the focal points of Romanticism. Any list of particular characteristics of the literature of Romanticism includes subjectivity and an emphasis on individualism; spontaneity; freedom from rules; solitary life rather than life in society; the beliefs that imagination is superior to reason and devotion to beauty; love of and worship of nature. The collection of poems published as *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) has traditionally been seen as the birthplace of English Romanticism.

The word romantic (ism) has a complex and interesting history. In the Middle Ages “romance” denoted the new vernacular languages derived from Latin - in contradistinction to Latin itself, which was the language of learning. *Enromancier*, *romancar*, *romanz* meant to compose or translate books in the vernacular. The work produced was then called *romanz*, *roman*, *romanzo* and *romance*. A *roman* or *romant* came to be known as an imaginative work and a “courtly romance”. The terms also signified a “popular book”. There are early suggestions that it was something new, different, divergent. By the 17th century in Britain and France, ‘romance’ has acquired the derogatory connotations of fanciful, bizarre, exaggerated, chimerical. In France a distinction was made between *romanesque* (also derogatory) and *romantique* (which

meant ‘tender’, ‘gentle’, ‘sentimental’ and ‘sad’). It was used in the English form in these latter senses in the 18th century.

It is one of the curiosities of literary history that the strongholds of the Romantic Movement were England and Germany, not the countries of the romance languages themselves. Our colloquial use of "romance" and "romantic" to describe intense emotional experiences can be traced back to this medieval sense of the word, and so can the 18th and 19th century concept of "Romanticism" as an intellectual experience. "Romantic" has in fact been used since the Renaissance to suggest free expression of the imagination in the arts, but mainly in a negative sense. Romantic imaginings were thought to interfere with the clarity of the art form, and so lay beyond the bounds of proper subject-matter. The term is used in many senses, a recent favorite being that which sees in the romantic mood a psychological desire to escape from unpleasant realities. Thanks to the influence of late 18th century German cultural theorists, "Romanticism" was adopted across Europe and the New World as a convenient description for distinctively contemporary modes of thought, losing in the process many of its negative connotations. Instead of "improbable" notions and "false" sensibility, Romanticism came to stand for authenticity, integrity and spontaneity. It was seen as a positive artistic and intellectual assertion of the extremes in the human psyche, the areas of experience beyond logic and reason which could only be expressed in a direct and heartfelt way.

These new concerns were seen as a valid response to the extremes of change and uncertainty which the age itself displayed. The Western world had been shaken by two political revolutions, in America (1776) and France (1789), and by an industrial revolution which was beginning to erode the traditionally agrarian lives of many people. New ways of living had to be reflected in new ways of thinking. Romanticism, for want of any better word, came to stand for this new experience of the world. The true Romantic was not an over-sensitive dreamer, but a heroic figure facing headon the painful realities of his time - a figure of genius. Romanticism has very little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic," although love may occasionally be the

subject of Romantic art. The Romantic Period in literature has very little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic," although love may occasionally be the subject of Romantic art. Today, in literary theory and history there is a distinction between the popular usage of romanticism and romantic, and the scholarly usage to name the Romantic period and Romanticism as a literary movement.

Sometimes we can forget that people carried on writing about love after the death of Queen Victoria. So, let's have a look at twentieth century literature, which gives us many different views on love, and loses many of the certainties we often found in Victorian literature. In doing so, it provides a much less judgemental view of different kinds of love.

You will find a large number of plays with love as their theme, but do not forget the late twentieth century plays of Sarah Kane, like *Blasted*, *Skin* and *Crave*, or Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* and Tom Stoppard's *Arcadia*. You will find that *Arcadia* gives you several different kinds of love to ponder on...

When looking at novels, you will find some thoughtful writing about homosexual love, look at *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, *Billy Budd* by Herman Melville and *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson. For heterosexual love in its many forms and complications look at *The Go Between* by L P Hartley, *Brideshead Revisited* by Evelyn Waugh and *Rebecca* by Daphne Du Maurier.

We can get an interesting view of unrequited love in some of the poems of W B Yeats, particularly *Broken Dreams*. Look at the early twentieth century love poems of Edna St Vincent Millay and then our current poet laureate Carol Anne Duffy and the rather sad, not quite in love, poems of Phillip Larkin. Don't forget poems of lost love, like *Funeral Blues* by W H Auden, the odd but charming love poems of E. E. Cummings and the Mersey Poets like Roger McGough.

You may well have your own favourites when it comes to twentieth century literature, so don't be shy, go back to them. Give your old favourites a second read, jot down some short, apt quotations and remember that you can refer to them in the exam if you wish, and, of course, if they fit in with the question!

What I want to talk around in this post are the intersections between History from Below and the History of Emotion. What might a history of emotion ‘from below’ look like, how do we get at it and how might it re-frame our understanding of the period I am particularly interested in – the mid-twentieth century? I’m approaching the 1940s and 1950s as decades when the meaning and status of feeling seems to be particularly contested. Tensions between a need for self-discipline and desire for self-expression, anxieties about the impact of war and secularisation on moral standards, and concern about the future of the family, coalesced into a post-war discourse of emotional instability. Within this context the correct management of emotion was a political as well as a personal matter and became a marker of effective citizenship in a rapidly changing world. And yet, I want to argue, emotion itself could drive social and political change, acting as a vehicle for the operation of agency within everyday life. It was also increasingly seen as a legitimate basis upon which to assert knowledge claims about the world and carve out a place within civil society. The historical study of emotion is, of course, founded upon the assumption that feeling is framed by time and place.[1] ‘Emotions themselves are extremely plastic’ observes the medievalist Barbara Rosenwein, ‘it is very hard to maintain, except at an abstract level that emotions are everywhere the same.’[2] The so-called ‘emotional turn’ has generated diverse approaches rooted in the various schools of historical practice within which scholars operate. Some approach emotion itself as – to borrow from Joan W. Scott – a ‘useful category of historical analysis’.[3] Ute Frevert, for example, has recently published a highly suggestive history of the emotional economy of emotions; in 2012 a themed issue of *Rethinking History* edited by Benno Gammerl sought to expand the scope of historical approaches to emotion by introducing the concept of ‘emotional styles’. Elsewhere Thomas Dixon has usefully charted the intellectual history of the keyword at the heart of the emotional turn. Others continue to explore individual emotions such as love, anger, fear and anxiety across different time periods and locations. Within the British context work by Stephen Brooke, Marcus Collins, Martin Francis, and Simon Szreter and Kate Fisher has illuminated the political, cultural,

social and economic dimensions of love for example whilst Luisa Passerini and Simon May have mapped its intellectual history. Over the last few years I’ve also been working on a social history of twentieth century love.

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