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EARLY ROMANTIC PERIOD IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Abstract: The Early Romantic Period in American Literature, which lasted from 1830 to 1865, was influenced by the European Romantic Movement and marked a significant shift in literary style. This age saw a shift away from European intellectual traditions and towards distinctly American emotional and imaginative expressions. It was a time to explore and celebrate one's spirituality and intrinsic goodness, while also acknowledging human fallibility. Transcendentalism and Dark Romanticism emerged during this period, representing hopeful and pessimistic worldviews, respectively. Romanticism flourished in literature throughout this revolutionary age, with an emphasis on emotions, intuition, nature, and the celebration of the "common man". American Romanticism shifted away from Puritanism and Calvinism, emphasizing individuality and human potential. During the romantic period, writers used contrasts like good vs evil and light versus dark to explore the intricacies of life. This movement, fueled by romantic literature and poetry, shaped the American literary landscape and continues to have an impact today.

Key words: Romantic period, American literature, movement, nature, early period, poetry.

The Origins of American Romanticism

American Romanticism arose as a powerful literary movement, breaking away from the severe tenets of Puritanism and Calvinism. It echoed the nationalist attitudes of the moment by promoting individualism and common values [1]. The American Renaissance aimed to build a distinct literary voice from European influences [2]. During this time, renowned American writers rose to prominence, exploring themes of self-expression and freedom. Walt Whitman, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau were influential figures in American literature, each adding their own unique perspective [2]. Their paintings showed a genuine admiration for nature and a curiosity about the unknown, generally situated in the American frontier—a symbol of possibility and freedom [1].

This period, which lasted from about 1830 to the end of the Civil War, not only set a new direction for American literature, but also helped shape the country's identity. During Andrew Jackson's administration, literature reflected societal democratic principles, emphasizing individual dignity and rights [2, 3]. American Romanticism, which emphasized personal feeling and the natural environment, challenged the industrial and mechanistic ethos of the day. It was inspired by the romantic ideas that emerged in Europe after the Enlightenment.

American Romanticism, a literary movement with a rich thematic complexity, valued the individual's experience and emotions over communal or merely rational intellect. This movement emphasized the human connection to nature and the power of imagination, often juxtaposing the natural world's tranquil beauty with the individual's turbulent inner life [5, 3, 4]

Individualism and Freedom.

Individualism: The movement prioritized personal freedom and self-expression over collective identity

Themes of democracy and individual rights were prominent, representing the American spirit of freedom and independence

Nature and Imagination

Nature was celebrated as a source of spiritual rejuvenation and inspiration, representing both the sublime and the picturesque

Imagination Over Reality: The focus was on the power of imagination in creating worlds beyond the observable, exploring themes of the unknown and strange

Emotional depth and subjectivity

Romantics prioritized subjective emotions and innate knowledge above objective proof

Exploration of Deep Emotions: The literature explored complex emotions and the pursuit of truth through introspective and lonely experiences

Societal Reflections

Social Reform and Abolitionism: The themes intertwined with social topics such as abolitionism, reflecting turbulent societal upheavals of the period.

Romanticism regarded commonplace events as worthy of literary inquiry

Unique American Identity

American Writers' Identity: The era ushered forth a distinct American literary voice, influenced by the country's unique experiences and landscapes

Frontier as Opportunity: The frontier was a reoccurring concept, representing independence and opportunities for personal and national advancement

American Romanticism defined a literary age and impacted the nation's cultural and philosophical character by praising individuals and exploring natural and spiritual landscapes.

Key Authors and Their Masterworks

Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter" explores guilt and salvation in Puritan society [8]. His second notable work, "Young Goodman Brown," delves into the darker aspects of human nature and sin [9].

Edgar Allan Poe: Known for his gothic and gloomy love tales, Poe's "The Raven" and "The Tell-Tale Heart" demonstrate his ability in exploring the macabre and psychological depths of his characters [8][9][10].

Herman Melville's epic work "Moby Dick" explores man vs nature through symbolism and sophisticated character development [8][10]. Melville wrote "Bartleby, the Scrivener," which explores themes of alienation and existentialism [9][10].

Emily Dickinson: Dickinson was a prolific poet whose works include "Hope" with feathers and "I'm Nobody!" "Who Are You?" is known for its poetic flair and themes of nature and identity [9][11]. Her inventive use of form and powerful passion make her a major character in American Romantic poetry [8].

Walt Whitman: His poems "I Hear America Singing" and "When I Heard the Learn'd Astronomer" use a revolutionary free verse form to convey individualism and democracy [11].

These authors and their writings not only defined the American Romantic period, but also continue to impact writers and intellectuals all over the world. Their contributions reflect the rich cultural and philosophical tendencies of the time.

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