CHAPTER TWO

WHAT IS ROMANTICISM?

2.1 Introduction

The first question that confronts a scholar interested in the field of English Romanticism is this: What is Romanticism? Anyone interested in answering this question will not fail to notice that most of the studies that attempt to conceptualize the socio-cultural phenomenon called Romanticism begin by acknowledging the complexity of the movement/moment in the cultural history of England popularly known as Romanticism. This frustration is manifest in Lovejoy’s rather exaggerated claim that “no man can say what “the meaning” of the word “Romanticism is…” (“The Meaning of Romanticism” 258). Lovejoy concludes that “the word "romantic" has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing” (“Discrimination of Romanticisms” 232).

The vagueness of the term ‘Romanticism’ confused scholars from the very beginning. Glen Levin Swiggett, one of the earliest critics to discuss the matter, acknowledges the confusion without any hesitation: “There is a certain something that serves to join these men (the Romantics). The fact of their differentiation is not more patent than that of their conjunction. It would be folly and sheer conceit for us, in fact of what has been said, to presume to say what this may be” (152).

Parker, in his “Reflections on Romanticism” (1918), states that probably “no two persons have exactly the same conception of what romanticism is” (307). For Kaufman, “No more persistent problem forces itself upon the student of literature and the historian of thought at the present time than the interpretation of the term romanticism” (Kaufman, 193). The same view is
shared by Burgum who believes that “He who seeks to define Romanticism is entering a hazardous occupation which has claimed many victims” (479).

Having ventured to write a book boldly titled *What is Romanticism?* Henri Peyre makes it clear that he too is circumspect in fixing a definition:

The title of the book presents us with a question that has been repeated. There have been attempts to respond to it but the answers have been inconsistent. It would be fruitless to make yet another effort to invent a unique formula to explain a group of phenomena that frequently vary considerably from country to country and generation to generation. (vii)

As Kravitt suggests in his article “Romanticism Today” (1992), one “must tread cautiously in hazarding another encounter with that misleading term romanticism” as the field “is strewn with snares and pitfalls that thwart investigation” (93).

In an answer to Clement’s question “Why the description of what romanticism possibly is but the avoidance of the term? Schueller argues that “one may safely conjecture that anyone who at this late date uses the word "romanticism" for literature or who even attempts to struggle with a definition of it can be accused of temerity indeed” (359). As early as 1965, Peckham contended that ‘Romanticism’ is the most vexing problem in literary history, “even more irritating than the problem of the Renaissance” (Cited in Clubbe, 1983 ix).

Halsted outlines the endless debate of the definition of the words ‘Romantic’ and ‘Romanticism’ by opening his book *Romanticism* with the following interesting statement:

We all feel we know what ‘romantic’ means: the word conveys notions of sentiment and sentimentality, of a visionary idealistic lack of realism, of fantasy and fiction. It has been
associated with distant places and times—the island of Bali, the world of the Arabian Nights, the age of troubadours. Advertising links it with the effects of lipsticks, perfumes, and soap. Such a range of implication causes little trouble in common parlance, but scholars have been quarreling over the meaning of “Romanticism” for nearly 150 years.

(1)

This term, as Leighton realizes, “continues to provoke discussion as a period, a movement, a concept, or simply a state of a mind” (1).

The near-total absence of consensus is confusing to non-European scholars of Romanticism looking for help the Europe-specific strands of Romanticism, Romanticism as an epiphenomenon of the changing economic relations, and the ‘universal’ ones, Romanticism as the response of a group of people to the major shifts in their cultural landscape. The problem of Euro-centrism, the reluctance to see Romanticism as anything other than the European society’s nostalgia for the past or as a critique of the present which is the ideological reflex of the changing relations of production, gets in the way of seeing Romanticism as a human response to the radical changes in any society. Even Morse Peckham (1951), who hoped for a theory of Romanticism, has confined himself to the Western Romantic Movements in his brave attempt to build Romanticism as a theory. Although he believes that Romanticism has two primary referents: (1) a general and permanent characteristic of mind, art, and personality, found in all periods and in all cultures; (2) a specific historical movement in art and ideas which occurred in Europe and America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; he hurriedly declares that he is concerned with the second of these two meanings.
The context of the present work makes it possible for the researcher to evoke notions like 'human nature' and 'universals' in order to re-read the history of certain Arabic literary-cultural movements, which defy definition. This context is the post-humanist society where the search for a common core of human life has resumed after a few decades of total skepticism about 'essence' 'meaning' and value'. This is evident from the way seasoned critics like Terry Eagleton, who were fascinated by postmodern theory with its anti-humanism and anti-foundationalism rhetoric, have sought to make the body, and the instincts the basis on which a new society that is marked by the acute awareness of the common plight that brings all humanity under one ideological roof (Eagleton 2003). The main objective of this chapter is thus to present an overview of the Romantic scholarship with the hope of understanding what may be called the core of Romanticism manifest through Romantic art, so as to apply it in an effort to understand a non-European canon.

2.2 The Origin of the Word

The history of the term 'Romantic' has been discussed in some detail by many writers; amongst them are Aidan Day (1996), Seamus Perry in Duncan Wu's (1999), and Logan Pearsall Smith (1925). I base my definition of the term mainly on these three studies.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the first appearance of the word 'romantic' was in the middle of the seventeenth century. It was derived from the word romaunt, meaning 'romance', which was borrowed into English from French in the middle of the sixteen century. Romance was, and is, a term used to describe medieval and Renaissance tales — in verse of various forms, ranging from ballad to epic — concerning knights and their chivalric exploits. On the other hand, the word 'romantic', in its first appearance, described what were perceived as the
fictions of the old tales, with their enchanted castles, magicians, ogres and their representation of inflated feelings and impossible fashions.

The identification in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the Romantic was stimulated by the increasing trust and by the appreciation of classical values and forms:

The *OED* has an engaging seventeenth-century example of simple outrage in ‘The romantic visionary scheme of building a bridge over the river at Putney’; but it goes on to quote from the mid-nineteenth century, ‘A romantic scheme is one which is wild, impracticable, and yet contains something which captivates the fancy’. Such a softening of rational disapproval to a kind charmed indulgence seems to characterize the word in the later eighteenth century. (Wu 5)

It was the famous German writer Wilhelm Schlegel who first distinguished between the classical and the Romantic in his lectures. Rene Wellek has summarized Schlegel’s ideas as follows:

In the Berlin lectures, given from 1801 to 1804, though not published until 1884, Schlegel formulated the contrast, classical and romantic, as that between the poetry of antiquity and modern poetry, associating romantic with the progressive and Christian. He sketched a history of romantic literature which starts with a discussion of the methodology of the Middle Ages and closes with a review of the Italian poetry of what we would today call the Renaissance. Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio are described as the founders of modern romantic literature, though Schlegel, of course, knew that they admired antiquity. But he argued that their form and expression were totally unclassical. They did not dream of preserving the forms of antiquity in structure and composition. ... But the most important formulation was in the in the Lectures of A.W. Schlegel delivered
at Vienna in 1808-09 and published in 1809-11. There romantic-classical is associated with the antithesis of organic-mechanical and plastic-picturesque. There clearly the literature of antiquity and that of neoclassicism (mainly French) is contrasted with the romantic drama of Shakespeare and Calderon, the poetry of perfection with the poetry of infinite desire. ("Concept of Romanticism" 6-7)

As a matter of fact, the word 'Romantic', as it applies to the literary history of England, is a posthumous invention: the Romantics did not know that was what they were. "Writers of the time were certainly classified by contemporary critics, but as the 'Lake School' (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey), the 'Domestic School' (most notoriously, Byron), the 'Cockney School' (Leigh, Hunt and Keats), and so forth – often to the disgruntlement of the writers concerned, predictably" (Wu 4).

The first person who describes the English poets of the early nineteenth century, especially the 'Lake School', forming a 'Romantic School', is Hippolyte Taine in 1863 who made an analogy with the French 'Romantics' of the early nineteenth century. In 1864 John Murray published *A History of English Literature*. It was a reprint, revised and enlarged by William Smith, of Thomas B. Shaw's *Outline of English Literature*, published first in St Petersburg in 1846 and again in London in 1849. The title of one of its chapters was 'The Dawn of Romantic Poetry' which opens:

The great revolution in popular taste and sentiment which substituted what is called the romantic type in literature for the cold and clear-cut artificial spirit of that classicism which is exhibited in its highest form in the writings of Pope was, like all powerful and durable movements, whether in politics or in letters, gradual. The mechanical perfection
of the poetry of the age of Queen Anne had been imitated with such success that every
versifier had caught the trick of melody and the neat antithetical opposition of thought;
and indications soon began to be perceptible of a tendency to seek for subjects and forms
of expressions in a wider, more passionate, and more natural sphere of nature and
emotion. (Cited in Day 87)

By the end of the nineteenth century the term ‘Romantic’ had become relatively
commonplace as a means of referring to writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth
centuries who had reacted against eighteenth century Neoclassicism. In 1885 W. J. Courthope in
his book The Liberal Movement in English Literature grouped them as ‘The Romantic
Movement in English Literature’. He was apparently interested in what he saw as the political
associations of the literature he was dealing with and analyzed the correlation between socio-
political revolution and Romanticism (Day 88).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the term ‘Romanticism’ acquired negative
connotations, which can traced back to the hostile reaction toward literary Romanticism by
some realist and modernist writers, poets, and critics such as Henry James, Mark Twain, T. S.
Eliot, Irving Babbitt and others. They consistently pointed out what they considered to be the
defects of Romantic literature. Russell Noyes explains this negative attitude as follows:

The most hostile anti-romantic criticism has come from those who have assumed that
modern science has made it rationally impossible to maintain romantic beliefs about man
and nature. They have concluded that science has proved nature to be wasteful, cruelly
savage, and brutal. They have seen man as the mere product of matter, as prisoner of
blind chance without choice and without will in a horrible prison house. In such a world
the Romantic appear to be childish dreamers; their picture of natural beauty, mere illusions; their moral values, utter emptiness. (Cited in Alsen 2000, 2)

T. S. Eliot attacked the Romantics as being immature. In his criticism of Byron, whom he considered the symbol for Romanticism in general, Eliot argues that Byron added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning of individual words. Shelley's ideas seem always to Eliot ideas of 'adolescence' and thus, 'repellent'. Shelley himself was, according to Eliot, humorless, pedantic, self-centered, and sometimes almost a blackguard. In "The Function of Criticism" (1923), Eliot declares his sense of the difference between the classical and the Romantic work as being "the differences between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic" (Selected Essays, 26).

2.3 Romanticism: A Movement or a Concept?

In England and America, in the twentieth century a whole series of books and articles was devoted specifically to definitions of the nature of romanticism. I pursued some of the more prominent of these writings, and arranged them chronologically with the aim of picking up some idea with which I can formulate my understanding of the Romantic phenomenon and thus help me to develop the main argument of my thesis.

The debate of defining Romanticism started very early in the twentieth century particularly in 1903 with Swiggett's article "What is Romanticism?". Swiggett first introduces the fact of the diversity of the romantic work: "... the reader is painfully aware that, while the salient characteristics of the movement treated are preeminently what one might call romantic, yet there are certain minor shades or undercurrents which would exclude much of the material in these
books, if one insisted upon calling that romantic which is ordinarily so considered by one people at one time” (151). He assures that there is something which serves to join the Romantics and the fact of their differentiation is not more patent than that of their conjunction.

Swiggett is seeking to “catch the fleeting fragrance of that strange passion-flower that blooms only in the poet’s heart – the Blue Flower of Novalis. A few of the many attempts to define this flower will, however, serve to point that way.” (152) He believes that the Celtic tradition in the legends of Arthur’s court and its environs, and the Arabic with Sinbad and Sheherazade are two of the strongest forces in the interpretation of what he calls ‘modern romanticism’, “without which nothing like a satisfactory appreciation could be obtained” (156).

Before he states his concluding definition of Romanticism he sets the following question to distinguish it from Classicism:

May we then call romanticism the ceaseless and hopeless longing to realize objectively the inner aspirations, the fleeting desire to catch and fix for all time these secret whisperings pointing to a greater beauty beyond the actual? When man is content with his handiwork, and can say to the speeding phantoms of his creative fancy, “Stay, thou art so fair,” we have a moment in classicism. When these things are pointed with the precision of art and have order in their beauty, grace and dignity in repose, and create a sense of perfect rest, they become the permanent things in art and life. (160)

Romanticism becomes, as he concludes, “the personal, the temperamental force in literature, vague and undefined” (160). It deals with symbols rather than concrete images and works through suggestions and intuition.
The conflict between Romanticism and Rationalism is discussed by Frank Thilly in 1913. He states that the Romantics “endeavored “to deliver man from the terrors of the objective world,” as Schelling once expressed it; only they were not satisfied with merely thinking the thing in itself, they yearned to see it face to face, in intellectual or artistic intuition, through a function which Kant had denied to human reason, but which his two successors held to be possible by an act of will” (112).

Parker argues that it is impossible to negate the fact that the word Romanticism is employed to indicate a work which is not classical. So, to understand Romanticism, we first have to ask “What is meant by a classic?” Then he illustrates some attempts at contrasting the two terms: “One writer, eschewing this method and satisfied with a grand show of authority, tells us that "classicism is routine, romanticism is liberty;" another, with equal confidence, that "classicism is imitation, romanticism is originality"” (307). In this respect, Stendhal argues that all good art was Romantic in its day. “Romanticism,” he holds, “is the art of presenting to people the literary works which in the actual state of their habits and beliefs are capable of giving them the greatest possible pleasure; classicism, on the contrary, of presenting them with that which gave the greatest possible pleasure to their grandfathers” (Cited in Parker 307).

In Parker’s view Dr. William Barry, whom he regards a critic of repute, was nearer to the mark when he said:

The classic is and must be the conservative, careful of the type, doting on past wonders, to whom the rules and forms of the ancients are synonymous with perfection. He looks back on a world better than his own. Not so the romantic, whose millennium is yet to
come. Therefore rebel and revolutionist he will be, seeking a type of which he dreams, nowhere as yet visible. (Cited in Parker 307-308)

Stewart refers to three main aspects of Romanticism which he calls new ideas in the air and were represented in some form by writers of the Romantic school. Firstly, a startling and widely prevalent distrust in the strength of human reason. Secondly, an immensely deepened interest in the past, and at least the beginning of a far more adequate appreciation of history. And the third one is the assertion as a definite principle of the trustworthiness of feeling, of instinct, of the "impulses of the heart," against dialectic, ratiocination, intellectual "proof" or "disproof." (365)

Though he doubts that the word 'Romantic' can fulfill the essence meaning of this new spirit that spread over Europe in the nineteenth century, he accepts that it has the sanction of long usage, and for want of a better it may still serve.

In his famous essay "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" (1924), Lovejoy opens with a remarkably sarcastic survey of the state of contemporaneous commentary on Romanticism:

For if some Dupuis of to-day were to gather, first, merely a few of the more recent accounts of the origin and age of Romanticism, he would learn from M. Lasserre and many others that Rousseau was the father of it; from Mr. Russell and Mr. Santayana that the honor of paternity might plausibly be claimed by Immanuel Kant; from M. Seilliere that its grand-parents were Fenelon and Madame Guyon; from Professor Babbitt that its earliest well-identified forebear was Francis Bacon; from Mr. Gosse that it originated in the bosom of the Reverend Joseph Warton; from the late Professor Ker that it had "its beginnings in the seventeenth-century" or a little earlier, in such books as "the Arcadia or the Grand Cyrus"; from Mr. J. E. G. de Montmorency that it "was born in the eleventh
century, and sprang from that sense of aspiration which runs through the Anglo-French, or rather, the Anglo-Norman Renaissance”; from Professor Grierson that St. Paul’s "irruption into Greek religious thought and Greek prose" was an essential example of "a romantic movement," though the "first great romantic" was Plato; and from Mr. Charles Whibley that the Odyssey is romantic in its "very texture and essence," but that, with its rival, Romanticism was "born in the Garden of Eden" and that "the Serpent was the first romantic." The inquirer would, at the same time, find that many of these originators of Romanticism --including both the first and last mentioned, whom, indeed, some contemporaries are unable to distinguish --figure on other lists as initiators or representatives of tendencies of precisely the contrary sort. (230)

Lovejoy justifies that these differing versions of the age and lineage of Romanticism are due to a corresponding diversity in the descriptions offered by those of his time who have given special care to the observation of it. He illustrates some diverse and sometimes contradictory definitions of Romanticism introduced by his contemporaries (See his essay, 231). Even the offspring with which Romanticism is credited are as strangely assorted as its attributes and its ancestors:

It is by different historians—sometimes by the same historians—supposed to have begotten the French Revolution and the Oxford Movement; the Return to Rome and the Return to the State of Nature; the philosophy of Hegel, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and the philosophy of Nietzsche ... the revival of neo-Platonic mysticism in a Coleridge or an Alcott, the Emersonian transcendentalism, and scientific materialism; Wordsworth and Wilde; Newman and Huxley; the Waverley novels... (232).
The result of these diverse perspectives on Romanticism is confusion in terms and ideas and of the word ‘Romantic’ “has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing” (232). Thus, one of the few things certain about Romanticism is that the name of it offers one of the most complicated, fascinating, and instructive of all problems in semantics. So, he suggests that the first step to clear up, or to diminish, this confusion of terminology and of thought is to use the word ‘Romanticism’ in the plural.

Kaufman too discusses the problem of the diversity of defining Romanticism in his essay ‘Defining Romanticism: A Survey and a Program’ (1925). He refers to some of these definitions to state his argument. For example, P. R. Frye defines romanticism as anything which tends, to disrupt or disturb the balance of the faculties; J. G. Robertson suggests that Romanticism in all lands stands for a conciliation of life and poetry; “Other recent definitions repeat the well known view that romanticism is the effort to “escape from reality”, “extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility,” or the expression of the impulsive, ” expansive ” desires of human nature” (195).

Facing the complexity of the phenomenon, the scholars have only three choices: 1- abandon the effort as hopeless. 2- continue to drift in the aimless course, accumulating further “random studies in the romantic chaos”. 3- lay out a new systematic plan of campaign: scrutinizing afresh the terms, they are accustomed to use in their formulations; analyzing the different applications of the "romantic" to the different fields so described, such as the aesthetic, the psychological, the ethical, the social; achieving thereby finer and clearer distinctions; and so preparing the way for the possibility of some common agreement. Kaufman supports the third one as he believes that the continuity in what he calls “the present random course” will not enable them to “construct, a solid causeway across the warring elements to a firm ground of understanding” (196-197). “1
mean that”, he explains, “up to the present we simply have not attempted to organize our
information and opinions within the field covered by romanticism in any systematic way. We
have not ordered the facts in question and after proper analysis reduced them to rational,
workable syntheses” (197).

According to Kaufman there are three main principal difficulties of framing a satisfactory
definition:

1- The relation of romance and romanticism, represented, as just indicated, by the dual role
of the adjective "romantic."

2- The failure to denote, in defining romanticism, whether we refer to form, content, or
temper, or to more than one of these elements.

3- The fundamental question, growing out of the preceding, as, to the fields of human
interest in which we shall decide romanticism is a proper descriptive term. That is, shall
we confine the problem; so far as possible to the field of aesthetics, as Pater did when he
made his famous characterization of "strangeness added to beauty?" Or shall romanticism
be described in psychological terms, as "the recovery of imaginative power" or "the
predominance of imagination over reason and the sense of fact?" Shall we extend the
jurisdiction to the ethical realm and regard romanticism as the assertion of the individual
self or the escape from reality (199-200).

These three related difficulties must be, he suggests, systematically analyzed before making any
progress toward a scholarly agreement about the meaning of romanticism. He further suggests
that the new program cannot be limited to one literature. The comparative method is essential
here.
In his attempt to find out a common denominator beneath the extremely diverse qualities of English romantic literature, Fairchild (1940) confirms:

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge asserts that his contributions to *Lyrical Ballads* were intended to naturalize the supernatural, while Wordsworth's were intended to supernaturalize the natural. Both poets, in their different ways, seek to interfuse two realms of being. Keats dreams a union of truth and beauty; Shelley, a universe of love in which the phenomenal world and the Platonic paradise "meet and mingle." Blake entitles one of his poems *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Beneath the entire movement one perceives the desire to bring God, man, and nature, finite and infinite, real and ideal, familiar and strange, into a thrilling unity of diverse elements through the "shaping spirit of imagination"; one perceives the joy experienced when this vision is briefly approximated; and one perceives the despairing realization that the dualisms of modern life are irreconcilable,... (22)

But he acknowledges that he could not apply this interpretation to other countries; "I shall, on the contrary, emphasize certain qualities of the English romantic movement which seem distinctively English" (23).

Lovejoy again in another article published in 1941 assures the difficulty of answering the question, 'What is the meaning of Romanticism?'. For him the answer will either (a) contain the factually false assumption that the word has one understood and accepted meaning, or else (b) it will be a personal definition of the word, conveying no information except about the definer’s private taste in terminology, and not open to discussion, or comparison with any objective matters of fact (259).
Burgum (1941) is of the view that a comprehensive definition of Romanticism, with some
sharpness to it, is desirable; for “in the past our comprehensive definitions have not been sharp,
and our sharp ones have been provincial” (479). He then illustrates three different perspectives
on Romanticism: the discovery of the ego; the discovery of nature; the return to medievalism. He
sees these three different definitions of Romanticism predominated in three different countries:
medievalism in Germany, individualism in France, and naturism in England. Burgum aims at
bringing the three together into one. To do so, he announces that he has to agree with Professor
Babbitt’s assertion that the immediate ideological stimulus to international Romanticism was the
writing of Rousseau.

During the French Revolution, Rousseau’s ideas were conveniently compressed into the
symbolic form of the well-known slogan: *liberte, e’galite, fraternite*. These three terms
obviously do not correspond to the three we have previously used. They isolate one
aspect of Romanticism, the political; but it was the most important aspect in
contemporary opinion, and we should expect it to furnish the clue to our definition. (482)

He regards the phrase ‘liberty, fraternity, equality’ as “merely the sharp antithesis to neo-
classical principles: liberty is the opposite to the classical submission of the individual to the
eternal order of the universe; equality, a denial of the aristocratic hierarchy of social classes and
abstract values; and fraternity, a rejection of feudal disdain for democracy and the common man”
(482).

By focusing on the socio-economic context in England, France and Germany, Burgum
justifies the different versions of Romanticism due to the different reactions to the French
Revolution and Rousseau’s trinity of liberty, equality, fraternity which was “pre-mature for
Germany, essential for France, and dangerous for England; and was therefore neglected and
discarded in Germany, extolled in France, and both opposed and discarded in England” (483).
Thus, he concludes that Romanticism shall be defined as the cultural manifestation of these
material changes.

Rene Wellek, who rejected the extreme nominalism of Lovejoy in his article ‘The Concept of
‘Romanticism’ in Literary History’ (1949), argues strongly for the fundamental unity of
Romanticism. He insists that “the major romantic movements (English, French and German)
form a unity of theories, philosophies, and style, and that these, in turn, form a coherent group of
ideas each of which implicates the other” (129). He isolates what he believes to be three
“particularly convincing” criteria that sufficiently distinguish Romanticism from its predecessors
and competitors: “imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and
symbol and myth for poetic style” (161).

However, Clemens finds Wellek’s fundamental theoretical quarrel with Lovejoy hinging on
the sense and value of period terms for scholarly research. He refers to Wellek’s conclusion in
his essay:

We can go on speaking of romanticism as one European movement, whose slow rise
through the eighteenth century we can describe and examine and even call, if we want to,
preromanticism. Clearly there are periods of the dominance of a system of ideas and
poetic practices; and clearly they have their anticipations and their survivals. To give up
these problems because of the difficulties of terminology seems to me tantamount to
giving up the central task of literary history. If literary history is not to be content to
remain the usual odd mixture of biography, bibliography, anthology, and disconnected
emotive criticism, it has to study the total process of literature. This can be done only by tracing the sequence of periods, the rise, dominance, and disintegration of conventions and norms. The term ‘romanticism’ posits all these questions, and that, to my mind, is its best defense. (197-198)

Morse Peckham is the first scholar who clearly announces the possibility of building a theory of Romanticism in his well-known article ‘Toward a Theory of Romanticism’ (1951). To achieve his goal he finds it inevitable to state two important distinctions before dealing with his proposed thesis. First, he distinguishes between general Romanticism and historical Romanticism; and argues that he was concerned in his study only with the second meaning. Second, he thinks that “it is wise to dissociate the romanticism of ideas and art from these other revolutions (political revolution and industrial revolution)” (5).

With these two distinctions in mind, Peckham assumes, a theory of Romanticism can be stated. He suggests two tests to examine the success of the theory:

First, it must show that Wordsworth and Byron, Goethe and Chateaubriand, were all part of a general European literary movement which had its correspondences in the music, the painting, the architecture, the philosophy, the theology, and the science of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Second, it must be able to get us inside individual works of literature, art, and thought: that is, to tell us not merely that the works are there, to enable us not merely to classify them, but to deliver up to us a key to individual works so that we can penetrate to the principles of their intellectual and aesthetic being. (5-6)

According to Peckham, most scholars are convinced that something happened to literature between the death of Pope and the death of Coleridge, but they failed to tell exactly what
happened. As a result, they either avoided the term “Romanticism” entirely, or isolated some idea or literary effect and said, "This is romanticism." Only in the middle of the twentieth century there have been signs that some scholars at least are moving toward a common concept of Romanticism. “In 1943 Jacques Barzun spoke of romanticism as a biological revolution and in 1949, he defined it as part of "the great revolution which drew the intellect of Europe . . . from the expectation and desire of fixity into desire and expectation of change” (7).

Peckham then returns to the Lovejoy/Wellek debate, in an attempt to mediate between the two. He concedes that Wellek has established that there is indeed a consistent, historically localizable movement that we can agree to call ‘Romantic’; however, he believes that Wellek ultimately and paradoxically succumbs to the very skepticism he condemns in Lovejoy. Peckham wants to reconcile Lovejoy with Wellek and Lovejoy with himself hoping that he can go “far toward clearing up an essential problem which Lovejoy scarcely faced and with which Wellek is unable to come to terms” (9). To understand Lovejoy’s view of Romanticism, one has to read his book *The Great Chain of Being* beside his article ‘On the Discrimination of Romanticisms’ in which he states that the three new ideas of romantic thought and art are organicism, dynamism, and diversitarianism. But Peckham prefers to combine ‘organicism’ with ‘dynamism’ to be ‘dynamic organicism’. Wellek’s three criteria – organicism, imagination, and symbolism, he argues, are all derived from the basic metaphor or concept ‘dynamic organicism.’

Thus, dynamic organicism and diversitarianism are the two essential criteria of Peckham’s theory of Romanticism. To make his theory successful he introduces the term ‘negative Romanticism’ to solve the problem of Byron in the Romantic canon. “What then is Romanticism?” he asks in conclusion: “Whether philosophic, theologic, or aesthetic, it is the revolution in the European mind against thinking in terms of static mechanism and the
redirection of the mind to thinking in terms of dynamic organicism. Its values are change, imperfection, growth, diversity, the creative imagination, the unconscious (14).

But ten years later Morse Peckham published a new essay, ‘Towards a Theory of Romanticism: Reconsiderations’ (1961) which shows that he has changed his mind in the meantime. In this essay, he argues that the dynamic organicism is in fact a product of the Enlightenment. “Further”, he concludes, “the values of diversity, change, growth, and uniqueness, derived from organicism, are mainly late Enlightenment values, though, to be sure, relatively rare (7).

Georges Poulet considers Romanticism as “a rediscovery of the mysteries of the world, a more vivid sentiment of the wonders of nature, a more acute consciousness of the enigmas of the self” (3). The Romantics, according to him, did not want to describe in their poems an ideal world or the abstract existence of God. They wanted to express their own concrete experiences, their own immediate realities. They “took hold of the idea of eternity; but they removed it from its empyrean world into their own. In brief, paradoxically, they brought Eternity into Time” (7).

In a beautiful expression Schueller (1962) collected some previous conceptions of Romanticism to show how contradictory they were but at the same time accepted to define one term:

Romanticism is the resurgence of medievalism, we are told, or the medievalizing tendency; in contrast to health and classicism, it is sickness; it is emotion in full display, though primarily emotion not about form, but about a content; it can reveal the infinite, in the direction of which it tends; it is the reconciliation of opposites and the manifestation of free will as compared with necessity; it is the rediscovery of nature, and at the same
time a kind of religious pantheism; it is the renascence of wonder, and while it involves freedom, it also results in gloom and disaffection. It stresses subjectivity, but at the same time is allied with the spurious objectivity of science. Escaping into what the individual desires, it celebrates suicide, which is the apparent denial of life, though it also celebrates life in its richness and multiplicity. A kind of neo-platonism, a mysticism, a transcendentalism, it yet attempts to grapple with the phenomenon of perception and to discover the truths hiding behind it. (359)

Schueller further doubts if the main characteristics of Romanticism are exclusive. He asks: “Can imagination in theory or in practice indeed be thought to be its essence?” His answer was; “One cannot say how.” Then he justifies: “Without imagination there is no art at all-classical, baroque, or romantic” (360). Also, the originality and creativity often associated with Romanticism as its hallmarks are aspects of Classicism too. Thus, Schueller assumes, the question must be about the types of imagination, originality, or creativity involved, and their scope.

In spite of being convinced that “each of the usual characterizations of romanticism fails to hit the mark, that it is too specific in its particularity, and that, as describing the part, it fails to encounter the whole”, Schueller concludes that all of these characterizations have one thing in common, however: “At their core they give evidence that romanticism is the tendency to break the confines, the rules, the limits, to go beyond that which has been crystallized. All seem part of one group and all as a group seem to be symbols of the will, first to destroy, or disintegrate, and then to rebuild or create” (360).
For M. H. Abrams, the best way to deal with the romantic phenomenon is through a good understanding of its context. In his article ‘English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age’ (1963) Abrams insists on the deep influence of the French Revolution on the European life in the nineteenth century. He discusses its repercussions, political, intellectual, and imaginative, and the resulting waves of hope and gloom, revolutionary loyalty and recreancy.

In terms of poetry, Abrams believes that it was “entirely regenerated, thrown into worlds of thought and of feeling so new, that the poets everywhere felt themselves ... entering upon the dignity and the sincere thinking of mature manhood (28). Thus, he agrees with Hazlitt and his contemporary reviewers of the literary scene that the Romantic period was eminently an age bossed with the fact of violent and inclusive changes and Romantic poetry cannot be understood, historically without awareness of the degree to which this preoccupation affected its substance and form.

In his attempt to find out the attributes shared by the chief English Romantic poets (he excludes Byron and Keats), Abrams comes to the following concluding points:

1. First, these were all centrally political and social poets. It is by a peculiar injustice that Romanticism is often described as a made of escapism, an evasion of the shocking changes, violence, and ugliness attending the emergence of the modern industrial and political world. The fact is that to a degree without parallel, even among major Victorian poets, these writers were obsessed with the realities of their era. (43)

2. What obscures this concern is that in many poems the Romantics do not write directed political and moral commentary but (in Schorer’s apt phrase for Blake) “the politics of vision,” uttered in the persona of the inspired prophet-priest. (44)
3. Following the Miltonic example, the Romantic poet of the 1790s tried to incorporate what he regarded as the stupendous events of the age in the suitably great poetic forms.

(45)

Although Northrop Frye (1963) agrees that ‘Romanticism’ is a complex conception where ten thousand different things flash upon the inward eye with all the bliss of oversimplification, he believes that some things about it, however, are generally accepted. First, Romanticism has a historical center of gravity, which falls somewhere around the 1790-1830 period; hence, he rejected what he called “the fallacy of timeless characterization” (1). Second, Romanticism is not a general historical term like “medieval”: it appears to have another center of gravity in the creative arts. Third, even in its application to the creative arts Romanticism is a selective term; “We think of it as including Keats, but not on the whole, Crabbe; Scott, but not in general, Jane Austen; Wordsworth, but not on any account, James Mill” (2). Even when the term ‘Romantic’ is generally contrasted with two other terms, ‘classical’ and ‘realistic’, neither contrast seems satisfactory. And yet, fourth, though selective, Romanticism is not a voluntary category.

Frye comprehensively discusses the revolutionary elements of Romanticism against the earlier framework and the older construct of the European mind to prove his assumption:

What I see first of all in Romanticism is the effect of a profound change, not primarily in belief, but in the spatial projection of reality. This in turn leads to a different localizing of the various levels of the reality. Such a change in the localizing of images is bound to be accompanied by, or even cause, changes in belief and attitude, and changes of this latter sort are exhibited by the Romantic poets. (5)
Rene Wellek again ascertains his previous assumption of the nature and unity of European Romanticism in a new essay entitled 'Romanticism Re-examined' (1963). Defending his view, he tries to show that there is a growing area of agreement and even convergence among the definitions or, modestly, descriptions of Romanticism as they have been attempted by responsible scholars in recent decades in several countries. He makes a survey on these attempts in four Western countries, Germany, France, England, and the United States, hoping that it would bring out the differences in methods and approaches characteristic of the literary scholarship. Such a survey, he expects, would show that the varieties of national traditions which are often only in tenuous contact with each other will make the basic consensus about the nature of Romanticism stand out all the more convincingly. After completing his rich and long survey, Wellek concludes:

In all these studies, however diverse in method and emphasis, a convincing agreement has been reached: they all see the implication of imagination, symbol, myth, and organic nature, and see it as part of the great endeavor to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious. This is the central creed of the great romantic poets in England, Germany, and France. It is a closely coherent body of thought and feeling. (220)

In his book Romanticism (1969), John B. Halsted opens his argument by referring to the common feeling of easiness in grasping the meaning of the word 'romantic' in the second half of the twentieth century:

We all feel we know what 'romantic' means: the word conveys notions of sentiment and sentimentality, of a visionary idealistic lack of realism, of fantasy and fiction. It has been
associated with distant places and times—the island of Bali, the world of the *Arabian Nights*, the age of troubadours. Advertising links it with the effects of lipsticks, perfumes, and soap. (1)

Halsted prefers a scope of meaning similar to "general world view" or "a way of answering the main questions men face," which would give the terms "Romanticism" and "Enlightenment" a comprehensiveness like that of "Humanism." He believes that the usage of 'Romanticism' as a name simply for a type of art and of artistic taste, usually contrasted to 'classicism', is a narrow definition and will shape the readings in such a way that the complex reality of an era in the history of ideas will be lost. (1-2) In a wider sense, he regards Romanticism as "a name for interrelated and similar ideas and attitudes—and related and derivative forms of behavior—in the whole range of intellectual concern, in the arts, of course, but with equal import and novelty, I suggest, in religion, history, and politics" (2). It was the new thought, the critical ideas, the creative or despairing efforts to cope with the insufficiency of old ways of confronting experience. One of the main characteristics of Romanticism is that it is not a monolithic ideology, everywhere the same: "Ideas seldom move as systems. Men are brought up in particular historical moments and geographical locations that we must take account of" (7).

Howard Mumford Jones (1974) believes that the nineteenth century Romanticism has often been identified with a new interest in external nature, a new interest in the human soul, a new interest in the relation of man to God, and a new interest in certain sorts of cultures, particularly those distant in time or space from the then contemporary Western world. It was characterized by some scholars as a return to the Middle Ages and by others as modernity. It also "has been identified with philosophical idealism, including that of the transcendentalists, with a new interpretation of history, with a dynamic rather than a mechanical view of the universe, with a
revaluation of the emotions and emotional life, with the virtues of children, peasants, old people in the village or the countryside, and some sort of savages” (1).

L. Peter (1975) argues that one of the faults of recent Romantic studies is that they consequently have placed much less emphasis on the origins of Romanticism, and much more on its consequences. He believes that the problems which the Romantics faced are still with us: man in his relationship to history, society, to his own identity, and in his relationship to nature. This issue has been discussed, according to Peter, in what has loosely come to be called "consciousness criticism": “discussion of the problems of the alienation of man; of the relationship between the unconscious, consciousness, and self-consciousness; between ego and non-ego; between subject and object” (564). He concludes that the great and unique contribution of Romanticism to Modernity is the insistence that every human being is a distinct and autonomous entity. Similar view has been assumed by Henri Peyre in his book What is Romanticism? (1977) when he states that “there has always existed a romantic nature and sensitivity, these terms implying a predominance of passion over reason, the lure of the extraordinary, dissatisfaction with present and delight in suffering” (1).

In a similar vein, Isaiah Berlin, in his preface to H. G. Schenk’s book The Mind of The European Romantics (1979), states that whatever the differences between the leading Romantic thinkers, “there runs through their writings a common notion, held with varying degrees of consciousness and depth, that truth is not an objective structure, independent of those who seek it, the hidden treasure waiting to be found but is itself in all its guises created by the seeker” (xv).

Furst, in his comparative study Romanticism in Perspective (1979), writes that it is surly no exaggeration to claim that no other term of literary criticism has been invested with such a
startling wide range of meanings as Romanticism: “Since its introduction into the realm of literary criticism, the term has been a constant source of muddle and misunderstanding” (18). He further discusses the way the term ‘Romanticism’ had different meanings in different contexts and thus studies the Romantic Movements in three countries England, France and Germany comparatively under what he calls ‘the family likeness’ approach.

Even in the same context, according to Furst, it is false to assume that each country had a single, unified Romantic school with clear characteristics: “Who would have the temerity to speak of a ‘Romantic school’ in England after reading the visionary poetry of Blake and the mordant satire of Byron’s Don Juan?” (22) Considering these divergences within the Romantic movements of each land, as well as the multiplicity of meanings given to the term itself, he concludes that it is not surprising that the relationship between the various literatures should at first sight look like one long list of misconceptions. “For that which seemed Romantic to the Germans, did not strike the English and French as such; just as what was Romantic in the eyes of the French, was not so to the English or German, and so forth” (23). For these reasons, Furst is convinced that a straightforward comparison on a broad front between the Romantic schools of various lands is virtually impossible and may lead to a distortion that verges on falsification or to an outcome modified by so many qualifications as to lose most of its worth. To avoid this trick and open the door for a little hope of a finite definition of Romanticism, he applies the ‘family likeness’ approach where vital traits are distinguishable within the members of this family, “traits not manifest in a like manner or in equal intensity, but nonetheless such as to form a common, unifying element” (26).

Jerome McGann (1992) considers Wellek’s definition of Romanticism; “Imagination for the view of poetry, nature for the view of the world, and symbol and myth for poetic style” as classic
modern which has collapsed and a new debate about theory of Romanticism is vigorous – from cultural studies, feminist scholarship, even from various types of revived philological investigations. In his reevaluation of the term, McGann states that he was not concerned with the question of periodization as such and was more interested in the conceptual representations of romanticism:

So I worked to clarify the distinction between "the romantic period" (that is, a particular historical epoch) and "romanticism" (that is, a set of cultural/ideological formations that came to prominence during the romantic period). The distinction is important not merely because so much of the work of that period is not "romantic," but even more, perhaps, because the period is notable for its many ideological struggles. A romantic ethos achieved dominance through sharp cultural conflict; some of the fiercest engagements were internecine-the civil wars of the romantic movement itself. (735-736)

He thinks that Wellek has flattened out “the rough terrain of the cultural formation(s) we call romanticism”, and thus failed to map the phenomena comprehensively.

McGann notices that the contrast between the view of romanticism that dominated the period 1945-80 and the nineteenth century's view was equally startling. He confirms that "a close investigation of the ideas that particular romantic writers had about imagination, nature, and symbol or myth will disclose a series of similar fundamental differences" (738). He takes Byron as an example to show the problem of periodization; whereas Byron seems to stand at the very center of romanticism in the view of Goethe, Pushkin, Baudelaire and Nietzsche, the nineteenth-century English view is slightly different: “Though Byron remained an important resource for England and the English, he had emerged as a highly problematic figure” (736). He concludes
that, from this perspective, romanticism is inadequately characterized by a synthesis like Wellek's because the synthesis is too abstract and conceptual.

Aidan Day (1996) critiques the previous attempts to summarize Romanticism because most of them inevitably ended up over-systematizing and simplifying the phenomenon. Moreover, he doubts their conclusion which implied coherence “which closer inspection leads us to call in question” (5). Although he agrees that some of the elements by which Romanticism is defined in the summaries do appear in the writings of those who are now called Romantic, Day assures that it is not true that all British Romantic writers display all of those elements all of the time. Another aspect of criticism is that these summaries avoid recognition of the fact that any of the writers who are labeled Romantic may have changed or, at least, shifted opinion in the course of a writing career.

Justin Clemens, who declares that the central conception of his book *The Romanticism of Contemporary Theory: Institution, Aesthetics, Nihilism* (2003) is that “contemporary theory is still essentially Romantic – despite all its declarations to the contrary, and despite all its attempts to elude or exceed the limits bequeathed it by Romantic thought.”, makes a quick survey tracing the history of the definitions of Romanticism. One of his interesting assumptions is that the point of the weakness of Romanticism, which is its undefinability, is at the same time the point of its strength. It shares this quality with the term ‘Capitalism’, so he cites the following quotation of Slavoj Žižek replacing the word ‘Capitalism’ with the word ‘Romanticism’:

> The ‘normal’ state of [Romanticism] is the permanent revolutionizing of its own conditions of existence: from the very beginning [Romanticism] ‘putrefies’, it is branded by a crippling contradiction, discord, by an immanent want of balance: this is exactly
why it changes, develops incessantly – incessant development is the only way for it to resolve again and again, come to terms with, its own fundamental, constitutive imbalance, ‘contradiction’. Far from constricting, its limit is thus the very impetus of its development. Herein lies the paradox proper to [Romanticism], its resort: [Romanticism] is capable of transforming its limit, its very impotence, in the source of its power – the more it ‘putrefies’, the more its immanent contradiction is aggravated, the more it must revolutionize itself to survive. (10)

The other notable point stated by Clemens is that Romanticism cannot be defined because it is in its essence historical; “this fact logically prevents any definition from being offered of it” (16). He suggests that one can offer histories of Romanticism to solve this problem, but again these histories can never achieve the formal clarity of a logical definition.

Michael Löwy and Robert Stayre (2001) identify two reasons behind the difficulty of defining the romantic phenomenon. First, its fabulously contradictory character and its nature as “coincidentia oppositorum”: revolutionary and counterrevolutionary, individualistic and communitarian, cosmopolitan and nationalistic, realist and fantastic, retrograde and utopian, rebellious and melancholic, democratic and aristocratic, activist and contemplative, republican and monarchist, red and white, mystical and sensual. “These contradictions” they confirm, “permeate not only the Romantic phenomenon as a whole also life and work of individual authors, and sometimes even individual texts” (1). The second is the habit of using the term “Romantic” to designate not only novelists, poets, and artists but also political ideologues, philosophers, theologians, economists, and others. So they pose the question: “In what sense do such diverse phenomena, located in such disparate spheres of cultural life, derive from a single concept?” (1)
Accordingly, some critics find that the easiest solution is to eliminate the term itself. The best-known representative of this approach was the American critic Arthur O. Lovejoy. But this approach has not won support. Another expeditious method for getting rid of irritating contradictions of Romanticism, as discussed by Löwy and Stayre, is “to dismiss them by attributing to them the inconsistency and frivolity of the Romantic writers and ideologues themselves.” They claim that the most eminent representative of this school of interpretation is Carl Schmitt, the author of a well-known book on political Romanticism (2).

In this respect, several critics try to sidestep the difficulty by creating longer and longer lists of common denominators of Romantic literature. The most extensive of these lists to date is one Henry Remak proposes in an article on European Romanticism in which he establishes a systematic tabulation of twenty-three common factors: medievalism; imagination; the cult of strong emotions; subjectivism; interest in nature, mythology, and folklore; Weltschmerz; symbolism; exoticism; realism; rhetoric; and so on. Once again, “while acknowledging that these features are found in the work of many, or even most, Romantic writers, we still do not really know what Romanticism is. One could lengthen the lists indefinitely, adding more and more common factors, without coming close to solving the problem” (5).

Löwy and Stayre feel that the chief methodological weakness of this sort of approach is that it did not go below the surface of the phenomenon and was unable to give convincing answers to principal questions as:

What holds everything together? Why are these particular elements associated? What is the unifying force behind them? What gives internal coherence to all these membra disiecta? In other words, what is the concept, the Begriff (in the Hegelian-Marxist sense
of the term) of Romanticism that can explain the innumerable forms in which it appears, its multiple and tumultuous colors? (5)

Moreover, they are of the view that most of these literary studies have ignored the other dimensions of Romanticism, its political and cultural forms in particular. Yet, they focus on the benefit of recognizing the cultural multiplicity of Romanticism and that therefore set it as a worldview, a weltanschauung manifested in the most varied forms. They expect that this approach will represent a major step forward in relation to the narrow outlook that typifies the various academic disciplines. It will further make it “possible to take in the vast cultural landscape called Romanticism as a whole and to see that the tumultuous variety of its colors is illuminated from a common source” (8).

They critique those authors of Romantic studies who are unaware prevailing social conditions and looked only at the abstract sequence literary styles (Classicism-Romanticism) or philosophical ideas (rationalism-irrationalism). Even those who relate Romanticism in a superficial and external way to some particular historical, political, or economic event: the French Revolution, the Restoration, the Industrial Revolution, are not moving in the right direction. Most of these studies are limited and partial:

They focus on a single author or a single country or a single period (especially the early nineteenth century); they generally consider only the artistic and literary aspect of the phenomenon. And most important, they develop neither a precise definition nor a global vision of Romanticism: they offer suggestions and interesting insights rather than any overarching theory. (13)
In the introduction to his book *English Romantic Poets* (2004), Harold Bloom considers English Romanticism as a revival of Romance or more than a revival “it is an internalization of romance” (3). The poet takes the patterns of quest-romance and transposes them into his own imaginative life, so that the entire rhythm of the quest is heard again and again in the government of the poet himself from poem to poem. Bloom focuses on the native tradition of the major Romantic poets particularly when compared to the English Romantic heritage of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. “What allies Blake and Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats,” he notices, “is their strong mutual conviction that they are reviving the true English tradition of poetry, which they thought had vanished after the death of Milton, and had reappeared in diminished form, mostly after the death of Pope.”

### 2.4 Conclusion

Going by these views, it is fair to conclude as follows: Most of the above studies do not offer a convincing answer to the question: ‘Is Romanticism a concept or a movement?’. Although they propose to answer the general question ‘What is Romanticism?’, they do not try to make a clear distinction between ‘Romanticism’ the movement and ‘Romanticism’ the concept. They spend their energies on defining the phenomenon which emerged in Europe in the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. Trying to avoid the universal dimension or the global relevance of the term ‘Romanticism’, they find it difficult to deal with it as a tendency which cannot be restricted to particular space and time. Hence, their view of Romanticism, which by and large, reflects their understanding of European Romanticism, may not be totally applicable to other romanticisms, for example, American Romanticism, Chinese Romanticism, Indian Romanticism, Arabic Romanticism and so on.
Secondly, Romanticism was literary in its origin, closely related to poetry in particular. It then had its impact on art, music, philosophy and other fields. In this sense, the best way to deal with its essence is through the eyes of the poets who live the experience without spending time in theorizing it.

Thirdly, despite the acknowledged assumption of its undefinability, Romanticism has something at its core which always attracts the scholars to revisit it. It is open to revisionary readings and interpretations. Therefore, it is more efficient to focus on the core of Romanticism rather than its accidental, culture-specific features.

Before I start discussing my concluding account about this core of Romanticism, I need first to recall what Swiggett, Robertson and Kaufman suggest for the scholar to get a good idea of the nature of Romanticism. Swiggett assures that the similarities of the Romantics are more patently evident than their differences. He wants to “catch the fleeting fragrance of that strange passion-flower that blooms only in the poet’s heart – the Blue Flower of Novalis. A few of the many attempts to define this flower will, however, serve to point that way.” J. G. Robertson thought that Romanticism in all lands stands for a conciliation of life and poetry. Extending this view, Kaufman suggests that the new program cannot be limited to one literature. The comparative method is essential here. Seen as a tendency, rather than as a specific response to a particular series of related events in a specific socio-cultural milieu, Romanticism lends itself as an object of analysis across socio-historical contexts. The ‘Romantic tendency’ is found all the time in all cultures. The specific ways in which this reconciliation between art and life happens depends, of course, on each socio-cultural configuration.
The reconciliation is marked by rebellion against the existing norms, a return to Nature, and a vision of the ideal. Other features are secondary to, and are derived from, these three features. The rebellious spirit of the Romantic poet leads him to the strong belief in liberty, individuality and revolution not only against the neo-classical norms and techniques of poetry but also against the established political, cultural and religious institutions. The return to Nature is the evocation of the instinctive power which drives the poet to exalt emotions over reason and the spirit over intellect, to worship Nature, and to recall the metaphysical and supernatural elements. Finally, their search of the ideals of life leads the Romantic poets to imagination, a sense of the past, and an active interest in non-European cultures, seen as the exotic 'other'. The English Romantic poetry is the classic example of the way art is reconciled to life through rebellion, return and revision of the mundane through the creative vision. This explains the profound influence it had on literary cultural movements outside Europe. In this respect, I find it crucial to select three of the major English Romantic poets and show how they dealt with the main features of Romanticism: revolution, nature, and imagination.

Revolution

The spirit of revolution characterizes the poetry of most of the English Romantics; amongst them Shelley is the major outstanding figure. Besides being one of the finest lyric poets in the history of English literature, his long and political poems have shown the most problematic aspect of Shelley's character, "the revolutionist". Unfortunately, this caused him a lot of sufferings during his life. Paul Foot, who traces the revolutionary thoughts in Shelley's writings in his book *Red Shelley* (1984), refers to some of these difficulties. He complains that English scholars, for more than hundred years after Shelley's death, intended to ignore the fact that he
had been expelled due to the rebellious ideas reflected in his late writings, particularly his high-pitched pamphlet "The Necessity of Atheism" which was the first attack on the Christian religion ever published in English. Worst of all, Foot argues, was the treatment of his writing as few of the Shelley worshippers of the nineteenth century or twentieth century have bothered to explain how it was that the "greatest lyric poet in English history" had the utmost difficulty in getting anything published during his lifetime. *Prometheus Unbound* sold about twenty copies. The original edition of *Queen Mab* didn't sell any. The string of political poems in which Shelley wrote about the massacre of trade unionists and their families at Peterloo in 1819, were not published—for fear of prosecution for seditious libel.

Shelley attacks what he considers the threefold alliance of tyranny: monarchy, aristocracy, and religion. He bravely condemns the court as being a shelter for the imposters:

Yes! Smooth-faced tyrants chartered by a power

Called kings, who in the castellated keep

Of a far distant land wears out his days

Of miserable dotage, pace and quay

And by the magic of a dreadful word,

Hated though dreadful, shield their impotence,

Their lies, their murders and their robberies. *(Poems 82)*

In *Queen Mabb* (1812) a spirit of a young girl is wafted into the stratosphere by a Fairy Queen. The Fairy Queen shows her the earth with all its horrors. Chief among the horrors is:
The King, the wearer of a gilded chain

That binds his soul to abjectness, the fool

Whom courtiers nickname monarch, whilst a slave

Even to the basest appetites--that man

Heeds not the shriek of penury; he smiles

At the deep curses which the destitute

Mutter in secret, and a sullen joy

Pervades his bloodless heart when thousands groan… (Complete Poetical Works 762)

Around the king is the aristocracy:

Those gilded flies

That, basking in the sunshine of a court,

Fatten on its corruption! (Complete Poetical Works 763)

Though Shelley belongs to a noble family, he dedicates most of his poetic life to defend the poor and show their miserable conditions. His poem about the Starving Mother, which he called simply ‘A Ballad’, shocks the high class people with the fact they try to ignore about the tragic situation of the poor:

A woman came up with a babe at her breast

Which was flaccid with toil and hunger;
She cried: 'Give me food and give me rest—

We die if we wait much longer.

The poor thing sucks and no milk will come,

He would cry but his strength is gone—

His wasting weakness has left him dumb,

Ye can hardly hear him moan.

The skin around his eyes is pale and blue;

His eyes are glazed, not with tears—

I wish for a little moment that you

Could know what a mother fears.

Give me a piece of that fine white bread—

I would give you some blodd for it—

Before I faint and my infant is dead!

O Give me a little bit! (Cited in Foot 82)
The labor of the poor, Shelley believes, was organized, not to meet their own needs, but to extend the luxury of the rich. He explains how this injurious exploitation work in the notes on *Queen Mab*:

> The poor set to labour,—for what? Not to food for which they famish: not the blankets for want of which their babes are frozen by the cold of their miserable hovels: not those comforts of civilization without which civilized man is far more miserable than the meanest savage; ... no; for the pride of power, for the miserable isolation of pride, for the false of pleasures of the huddledth part of society. (*Complete Poetical Works* 795)

Shelley declares his refusal of the established religion which, as he thinks, has always been friendly to tyranny. The danger of established religion is that it shapes and guides the people’s behavior in society and thus could easily be persuaded that the supernatural power they believe in determines what is right and what is wrong, what should be done and what should not. By ‘established religion’ Shelley means that is adopted and enforced by governments. These governments, he notices, none of which were elected, were then able to determine the moral and social behavior of their subjects. And very often this morality bore no relation to the morality of the founder of the religion like Jesus Christ in the case of Christianity.

In *Queen Mab* Shelley sharply criticizes the government, the war and the squire; but when he comes to the priests who defend all three, he could not control his temper:

> Then grave and hoary-headed hypocrites,

> Without a hope, a passion, or a love,

> Who, through a life of luxury and lies,
Have crept by flattery to the seats of power,

Support the system whence their honours flow.

They have three words: — well tyrants know their use,

Well pay them for the loan, with usury

Torn from a bleeding world! — God, Hell, and Heaven.

A vengeful, pityless, and almighty fiend,

Whose mercy is a nick-name for the rage

Of tameless tygers hungering for blood.

Hell, a red gulf of everlasting fire,

Where poisonous and undying worms prolong

Eternal misery to those hapless slaves

Whose life has been a penance for its crimes.

And Heaven, a meed for those who dare belie

Their human nature, quake, believe, and cringe

Before the mockeries of earthly power. (Complete Poetical Works 769)

Nature

Of the English Romantic poets it is perhaps Wordsworth who is best known for his love and admiration of nature, a feature of his poetry that has been remarked upon many writers and
critics. Wordsworth describes himself as a worshiper of nature and announces that his love of it is "holy love":

We stood together; and that I, so long

A worshiper of nature, hither came

Unwearied in that service: rather say

With warmer love—oh! With far deeper zeal

Of holier love. (Poems 169-170)

William Wordsworth is, indeed, the epitome of a nature poet. He has a pantheistic view of nature in which he believes that God present not only in plants, animals but also in inanimate objects as well. He is said to have seen and to have had a man see nature as she really is, more truly than any other poet:

I called on both (earth and sky)

To teach me what they might. (Prelude 3, 112)

He expresses his belief that nature is the best guide and teacher, the best "book" to read and the sweetest music in this life:

Books! 'tis dull and endless strife:

Come hear the woodland linnet,

How sweet the music! on my life,

There's more of wisdom in it.
And hark! how blithe the thrrostle sings!

He, too, is no mean preacher:

Come forth into the light of things,

Let nature be your Teacher. (Poems 330)

Nature taught him and he taught the world that it is endowed with a spirit and a life of her own; therefore a living presence speaking to all those who were able to enter into intimate relationship with her and understand her language.

In fact, Wordsworth, at one time or another, either explicitly or implicitly, expresses in his poetry all of the ideas and sentiments of a worshipper of wild, animistic, pantheistic nature. He tells us in "Tintern Abbey" that in his love for nature at first he was more like one:

Flying from something that he dreads than one

Who sought the thing he loved. (Poems 168)

Nature, to him, was a great and wonderful passion, beautiful in itself alone. It seems to have been absolutely perfect except what has been corrupted by man:

I heard a thousand notes,

While in a grove I sate reclined,

In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts

Bring sad thoughts to the mind
To her fair works did nature link

The human soul that through me ran;

And much it grieved my heart to think

What man has made of man. (Poems 176)

Wordsworth pleases himself with the beauty of each detail of nature. To him, the gorgeous sunset, the wonderful castle, imposing mountains, the unfinished sheep-fold, the daisy in the field, the little patch of stars above, are all parts of God’s wonderful world, each important in its way. In “Tintern Abbey” he declares:

A lover of the meadows and the woods,

And mountains; and of all that we behold

From this green earth; of all the mighty world

Of eye and ear,... (Poems 169)

Concerning this feature of Wordsworth’s poetry, Bloom (1970) states that Wordsworth “loves nature for its own sake alone, and the presences of nature give beauty to the poet’s mind” (132).

Imagination

In imagination, Coleridge was the leader among all the English Romantics both in theory and practice. Through his theory of imagination which seems to be his greatest contribution to literary criticism, Coleridge revolutionized the concept of artistic imitation. To him, poetry is not imitation anymore, but creation- a creation based on the sensations and impressions received
from the external world. Such impressions shaped, ordered, modified and opposites are reconciled and harmonized by the imagination of the poet and in this way poetic creation takes place. In fact, Coleridge introduced philosophy and psychology into literary criticism in order to study the process of this poetic creation and the very principles of the creative activity. He considered the mind not as a passive agent, but as an active and creative power. According to this view, art is not a mere imitation of nature, it is re-creation. Beauty is nothing objective; it is imparted to the external world by the observer. In the apprehension of beauty, the soul projects itself into the outward forms of nature. In this way, the external is made internal, and the internal is made external. The soul of the artist fuses with the external reality and transforms and recreates. It is the idea which fuses and unites.

One of the major manifestations of Coleridge’s theory of imagination is the reconciliation of opposites. This is exquisitely embodied in his poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in which we find an ambiguous marriage between an uncanny universe and Christian symbolism. In the poem there are contradictory elements of atheism and religion which create an atmosphere of uncertainty to its world. It, perhaps, reflects the dilemma of the modern man and his constant questioning: Is this world set in an ordered cosmos, governed by Providence? Or is it at the Mercy of mere Chance, a game of dice? The poet’s use of Greek mythology leads to notions of chaos, chance and changeability to the poem. The Christian images, on the other hand, introduce the religious standard of sin and punishment to the world of the poem and the events, in the end, will inevitably emerge as unified, purposeful and harmonious.

Another aspect of reconciliation of opposites is between sea and land. The sea stands for volatility, imagination, and dreams. It does not follow the rules of reasoning. It further indicates feelings of isolation, alienation, and loneliness, detached from anything like home. On the
contrary, the realm of land represents the world of stability, common sense, rules, harmony, and logic. The anxious and unexpected meeting between the Wedding-Guest and the Ancient Mariner images the unavoidable contact between the two realms of world. In this confrontation Coleridge, wittily, reflects the inner conflict of human soul; a conflict between reason and imagination, order and random, thoughts and dreams, real and metaphysics, atheism and religion. The end of the poem indicates that the only solution is to merge these two poles of life. The Wedding-Guest, who is initially the representative of land, after knowing the Mariner’s story, is finally being able to envisage, and consequently accept, the mysteries and out-of-control sea life and thus represents the merging point between the two worlds of sea and land. Only at this point, the Wedding-Guest gets the power of a greater vision:

The Mariner, whose eye is bright,

Whose beard with age is hoar,

Is gone; and now the Wedding-Guest

Turned from the bridegroom’s door.

He went like one that hath been stunned,

And is of sense forlorn:

A sadder and a wiser man

He rose the morrow morn. (Complete Poetical Works 209)
Likewise, ‘Kubla Khan’, the unfinished ambiguous poem, reflects Coleridge’s powerful imagination. It is, by many critics, viewed as imaging the creative imagination. Interestingly enough, most of Coleridge’s contemporary critics underestimated it as a meaningless poem, just a product of opium. Hazlitt, for example, remarks that it proved Coleridge was one of the best writers of nonsense poems in English (Cited in O’Connell, 29). But later scholars rejected the old view which says that the poem is below criticism confirming that it is, in fact, beyond criticism. Therefore, it was open for a large number of interpretations from various perspectives; one of them, of course, is that it embodies the poetic creativity and Coleridge’s theory of imagination.

The first part of the poem (1-36 lines) symbolizes the unconscious stage of creativity, ‘a vision of dream’ as Coleridge called it. He was fascinated by the nature of dreams and referred in many occasions to the relationship between poetry and dreams. As a dreamer passes no judgment and accepts with full faith all that is happening within the dream, so the aim of the poet is to create a state of illusion for the reader akin to dreaming:

The poet does not require us to be awake and believe; he solicits us only to yield ourselves to a dream; and this too with our eyes open, and our judgment perdu behind the curtain, ready to awaken us at the first motion of our will: and meantime, only not to disbelieve. (Biographia Literaria 310)

With a spontaneous fluid of images in this part (a ‘stately pleasure-dome decreed’ by Kubla Khan in the midst of a landscape at once seen and unseen, the ‘sacred river’ that flows through all, the ‘bright’ gardens ‘with sinuous rills’ ... i.e.) the poet tempts the readers to a dream.
The conscious stage of creativity is depicted in the second part of the poem which shows a shift from a pure dream to what O'Connell calls a 'dream-like state' or 'the waking dream experience of imaginative fiction' (29). Here we find the 'I' of the poem:

A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw;

It was an Abyssian maid

And on her dulcimer she play'd,

Singing of Mount Abora (Complete Poetical Works 298)

Longing for the lost vision in part one, the 'I' is confident, as O'Connell comments, that if only he could 'revive within me her symphony and song', he could create in poetry a vision of that creation:

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,

That sunny dome! Those caves of ice! (Complete Poetical Works 298)

So can we consider the unconscious part of 'Kubla Khan' as primary imagination and the waking-dream part as secondary imagination? Perhaps yes.