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Preface (Special Issue, Romanticism Past and Present)

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Cover Page Footnote

The essays in this special issue are based on a series of lectures given at the Romanticism Past and Present Institute for secondary school faculty, sponsored by Sacred Heart University and the Connecticut Humanities Council. The writers of these essays had the specific task of selecting and presenting their material with secondary school faculty and their students in mind.

Preface

The essays in this special issue of the *Sacred Heart University Review* are based on a series of lectures given at the *Romanticism Past and Present* Institute for secondary school faculty, sponsored by Sacred Heart University and the Connecticut Humanities Council. Thus the writers of these essays had the specific task of selecting and presenting their material with secondary school faculty and their students in mind.

While the Romantic period is generally assigned to the years 1760-1840, the peaks in intensity of Romanticism differed from country to country and from discipline to discipline. Despite the vagaries of time and place, a pattern emerges from these essays, revolving around various forms of the theme of freedom: political, social, and personal; intellectual, emotional, and artistic. The Romantic period has its foundations in the political, scientific, and industrial revolutions of the eighteenth century, revolutions which liberated the individual from the forms and traditions of Classicism and gave each person the right and responsibility to define the self and its relation to the outside world. Thus Romanticism is imbued with introspection and with an awareness of the complexities of perception with respect to the world of nature and of man.

This liberation resulted in a Janus-like opposition of moods. Freedom from the confines of tradition brought with it a jubilant sense of the infinite potentialities of man, epitomized in William Wordsworth's famous lines about his experiences in the early days of the French Revolution: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" This expansiveness is also seen in the figure of the Byronic hero, who self-confidently challenges the gods — a heroic ideal historically embodied in the larger-than-life figure of Napoleon — and in the emergence of the sublime in the poetry of Wordsworth and the transcendent landscapes of Turner. Yet the concept of the sublime itself, with its combination of beauty and awe, adumbrates the opposite mood of Romanticism: darkness and dread. The questioning of religious faith and of the certainties of inherited political structures brought with it feelings of loss and insecurity; existential anxieties attended the need for redefinition of the self and its world. This darkness is evidenced in the religious torments of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* and of so many of

Hawthorne's characters and in the images of shipwrecks, demons, prisons, and death that permeate the art of the period.

This protean, organic character of the Romantic period cries out for a treatment that is interdisciplinary. Thus the purpose inherent in the *Romanticism Past and Present* Institute and the symposium which concluded it has been to present in one forum views of Romanticism from a variety of perspectives: history, literature, art, music, and media studies. This last, modern discipline reminds us that Romanticism is not only a term for a specific historical period; it is also a term for an impulse of the human spirit that can be witnessed in material as old as the Torah and as new as modern cinema. The essays that follow should do much to dispel any erroneous association of the term Romanticism with idealized love, fancy, and an inability to face reality. In its stead, we hope that these essays will provide their readers with a deepened understanding of the historical foundations and manifestations in various art forms of this important impulse of the human spirit. Practically speaking, they are intended as a resource for teachers in designing multidisciplinary curriculum units focusing on the Romantic spirit.

In closing I would like to acknowledge the contributions of the Institute's lecturers, Charles Eby, Sidney Gottlieb, Leland Roberts, Virginia Zic, David Curtis, and Christopher Sharrett, its educational consultant, Edward Murray, and its poster panel docent, Roch Josef Di Lisio. As Co-Director, David Curtis' hard work was indispensable in bringing the Institute and Symposium to successful completion. The generous cooperation of the Sacred Heart University administration and the staff members of the library and auditorium was also essential to the project's success. Finally, this issue of the *Sacred Heart University Review* is dedicated to the secondary school teachers enrolled in the Institute and their students, who are together embarked on a quest for knowledge that is quintessentially Romantic.

Judith Davis Miller
Director, *Romanticism Past and Present* Symposium