

## Romanticism, the Gothic novel, and *Wuthering Heights*

### Romanticism:

Romanticism refers to an artistic and intellectual movement that began in the late eighteenth century in Europe. Generally, Romanticism was a reaction against the dry rationality of the Enlightenment period, it focused on the sublimity of nature, it and stressed strong emotion as the source of beauty, art, and knowledge.

The Romantic literary movement was heavily influenced by the German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and a group of German Romantic writers who emerged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Emily Brontë was likely exposed to and influenced by the German Romantics when she and Charlotte studied literature and the German language in Brussels at a private school.

A group of British Romantic poets emerged in England during 1798 to 1832, which included William Wordsworth, Lord Byron and John Keats. These writers influenced literature throughout the nineteenth century. The Brontës were also familiar with the writings of these British Romantic poets.

**Romance** is a term with many meanings. In the Middle Ages, a romance was a tale in prose or poetry dealing with the adventures of a knight and filled with chivalric deeds and courtly love. In the nineteenth century, a romance was a prose narrative telling a fictional story that dealt with its subjects and characters in a symbolic, imaginative, and non-realistic way. Typically, a romance would deal with plots and people that were exotic, remote in time or place from the reader, and obviously imaginary. Hawthorne's *The House of Seven Gables* and *The Scarlet Letter*, with their exaggerated characters, its overtones of the supernatural, and their symbolic intertwining of the past and present, are examples of romance.

**Romanticism** generally is defined as the following:

- Romantic thought places higher emphasis on emotion than on rationality;
- it exalts the individual over society;
- it questions or attacks rules and conventions;
- it prefers Nature over the city;
- it sees humankind in nature as being morally superior to civilized humanity (the concept of the noble savage);
- It sees children as essentially innocent, until corrupted by their surroundings.
- Its quest for emotional fulfillment may take it in the direction of dark Romanticism, toward the Gothic.

**Gothic literature** is marked by a preoccupation with gloom, mystery, and terror. Often, but not always, it may involve the supernatural. A development during the Romantic era, the Gothic novel traces its origins to *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, published in England in

1764. Many other writers followed him, and in the United States, the first well-known Gothic novelist was Charles Brockden Brown. Later, both Hawthorne and Poe wrote in the Gothic mode.

**Gothicism can be defined as the following:**

- A castle, sometimes ruined or haunted; other sinister, ruined buildings
- Extreme landscapes and weather
- Death and madness
- Omens
- Ancestral curses
- Terrifying events
- Taboo or sensational topics; the trespassing of boundaries or societal norms
- The suggestion of the supernatural
- A villain or villain-hero driven by passion
- A hero whose true identity is unknown until the end of the novel
- A curious or persecuted heroine
- A heroine wooed by both a good and a dangerous suitor
- Revenge

**The Romantic, the Gothic, and *Wuthering Heights***

Whether or not *Wuthering Heights* should be classified as a Romantic novel, a Gothic novel, or a combination of the two, it certainly contains elements of both. In the space below, write down what features you can find for both Romanticism and Gothicism.

Romantic Features

Gothic Features