

# Romantic Revival in Subgenres of Late Victorian Fiction

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## Conclusion

Over the course of this thesis, several types of subgenres that existed during the end of the Victorian age were explored, but these subgenres are more than a reflection of an age: they are a reflection of a coping method, a type of writing that is explored over and over again as society deals with the changes around it. The fact that Romantic sentiments lie at the core of most forms of popular literature is based on the fact that both Romantic and popular literature thrive on nostalgia, on remembering a past that is seen through rose-tinted lens, on clinging onto emotion, faith, and the unsurpassed potential of the human imagination. The writers that this thesis has dealt with were stuck between two ages, looking upon the past longingly and looking fearfully to the future, and as such found themselves caught up in a tangled web of desperation and aspiration, fighting—like the Romantics did before them—a battle to control their own souls, spirits, and for their right to see the world as they chose to see it.

Conrad, as the first of these, was perhaps the most displaced, for not only was he a foreigner on British soil, but he was also an alien to the times in which he lived. The type of adventure in his novels reflects his belief in a more simple, courageous and virtuous existence than that he had found the modern world to have tarnished. All that was poured into *Lord Jim*; through Jim, Conrad portrays what he believes to be the state of the Romantic man in modern times. Jim's connection to nature, the power he gets from it, the desire that he has to reclaim his natural self, all stem from Romantic ideology. The tale serves as a reminder that man, in his natural state, is capable of incredible feats and of great sacrifices that stem from a kind of selflessness and being true to one's self that is lost in modernity. Though Jim's tale ends in tragedy, it is not the tragedy of a Romantic

man, but rather the tragedy of modern times.

Wilde began his writing career much like the first Romantics did, writing literature that was youthful and full of vigor. As he grew older, however, in a world where he could not find his place and in a society he both condemned and participated in, his works started to show the same level of disillusionment and distaste with experience that Wordsworth showed in his later life. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, he holds a mirror up to Victorian society, one that shows the decadence that was starting to spread little by little, changing the features of the nation. He does not, however, seek to simply show a picture of the actualities of society; he wants also to bring out his lamp, and reveal the hidden layers of meaning and longing that the people need to understand. His Romanticism was full of a kind of homesickness that could only be relieved by exploring matters beyond the present moment and the present situation, and so he reaches out to the supernatural, the divine and the imagination in hopes that man can see himself and paint himself in new colors, in a different portrait than that his age tried to paint to immortalize and immobilize him. In Dorian he created an example of a modern man who, in neglecting to feed his own supernatural and spiritual nature, killed himself more slowly and more surely than by any possible form of suicide. By succumbing to the supernatural effect of influence, Dorian tainted himself and others around him, in a vicious circle of spiritual death, and by failing to retain the pure nature of his soul, Dorian—much like the Victorian age in which he lived—spelled out his own damnation and allowed for his own expulsion from paradise.

Stoker's concerns and worries over the Empire, his stepping away from thinking only of the person as an individual but rather of the nation as an individual body, is what

allows him to keep his tone of optimism. In *Dracula*, he sets aside the problems of his society by urging people to unite for a greater good, with a belief that truly saving Britain can only be done when the people in it retain their innate history and their national culture that survived hundreds of years of turmoil. The struggle to create a balance between reason and faith at the core of the novel is not merely put forth as the problem of an individual, but as the problem of the Empire as whole, as the facets that defined the Empire for centuries started to erode because of guilt and fear. By reminding his characters of their heritage, their patriotic duty and the unity that faith provides over reason, he produced a work that retained a type of innocence that would soon be lost as the plight of modern man took over.

Autonomy first and foremost: that was the Romantic design. Relating man to himself, his environment, to the divine and supernatural within and without him, was a core Romantic principle and the main item to fuel Romantic imagination. The Romantic poets and the writers covered in this thesis attempted to echo how man can best survive when being at peace with himself and all that is around him. Until this day, these writers and their contemporaries are read by generation after generation of school students around the world because their tales of the imagination. Yes, they may be considered more of daydreams by some, but the truth of the matter is that they paved the way for the liberation of imagination, for the reevaluation of self and for the understanding of the changes in society. The scope of their writing has allowed for them to be interpreted and reinterpreted over and over again. They are products of their age, that is true; but they are also, in their manner of dealing with human feelings of fear, awe, aspiration, loyalty and hope timeless pieces of fiction. The Romantic tradition continued with them, and it will

continue as long as there is a sense of nostalgia for an unparalleled past in the face of an ever-changing society.