



Amitrakshar International Journal

of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR)

(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

Return to Romanticism in Cozy Literature: A Cross-Cultural Study of Western and Asian Responses to Comfort Reading

Oishik Karmakar¹

Abstract

This paper examines the parallels between Romanticism and the contemporary phenomenon of cozy literature, arguing that the later constitutes a twenty-first-century revival of romantic values in response to modern anxieties. Romanticism, emerging in the late eighteenth century as a counterforce to industrialization and rationalist thought, privileged emotion, imagination and communion with nature as sources of spiritual restoration and human authenticity. Through the works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley, the romantic movement emphasized nostalgia for innocence, the restorative power of the natural world and the significance of community and inner life. Cozy literature, though formally distinct, mirrors these priorities in its preference for small, enclosed worlds such as village tea shops, libraries and seaside cafés; its reliance on gentle mysteries and healing narratives; and its nostalgic evocation of simpler, slower-paced times. This paper demonstrates that, much like the romantic poets sought solace against the alienation of industrial modernity, cozy writers provide readers with refuge from digital fatigue, political instability and cultural fragmentation. By situating cozy fiction as a romantic inheritance adapted to contemporary contexts, this study highlights its enduring cultural function: to soothe, restore and reimagine human connection in times of crisis.

Keywords :

Romanticism, Cozy Literature, Healing Narratives, Cultural Revival

INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by global crises, technological acceleration and cultural fragmentation, the rise of cozy literature signals not merely a preference for lighter narratives but a deeper cultural and psychological shift. Cozy literature, often characterized by its intimate settings, gentle tone and emphasis on community and healing, has re-emerged as one of the most popular literary trends of the twenty-first century. While often associated with cozy mysteries in the Anglophone tradition - drawing on Agatha Christie's village detectives and continuing into modern culinary or bookshop series, the cozy aesthetic has taken root across the globe, particularly in Asia, where Japanese *iyashikei* or "healing" fiction, South Korean "slice-of-life" narratives and localized adaptations in other cultures resonate deeply with readers. This return to comfort-oriented storytelling is best understood as a modern-day return to Romanticism. Romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries sought to reassert the primacy of emotion, nature and imagination against enlightenment rationalism and industrial modernity. Likewise, cozy literature functions as a counterbalance to the alienation, rush and violence of modern life. Both traditions emphasize subjectivity, restorative intimacy with nature and nostalgia for a simpler world. Thus, by studying cozy literature through the lens of romanticism, one uncovers not only its cultural lineage but also its global psychological appeal.

1 Student, B.A. in English, St. Xavier's College (Autonomous), Kolkata

DOI Link (Crossref) Prefix: <https://doi.org/10.63431/AIJTR/3.II.2026.36-40>

AIJITR, Volume 3, Issue –II, March - April, 2026, PP.36-40

Received on 1st March, 2026 & Accepted on 10th March, 2026, Published: 31st March, 2026



AIJITR - Volume - 3, Issue - II, Mar-Apr 2026



Copyright © 2026 by author (s) and (AIJITR).
This is an Open Access article distributed
under the terms of the Creative Commons
Attribution License (CC BY 4.0)
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>)



Amitrakshar International Journal

of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR)

(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

Romanticism and the roots of “Coziness”

The Romantic movement emerged as a response to the upheavals of industrialization, urbanization and rationalist thought. Figures like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Sir John Keats turned toward rural landscapes, emotion and the inner life as antidotes to the mechanical worldview. Emerging in the late eighteenth century and flourishing through the nineteenth, romanticism insisted on the restorative power of nature, the authenticity of individual emotions and the importance of community and imagination. It was never merely a literary style but a cultural revolution, one that sought to restore balance to a world reeling from the effects of industrialization, urban sprawl and the cold mechanization of human life.

Cozy literature, though appearing centuries later in a different socio-cultural context, carries within it the echoes of romanticism. In its insistence on small worlds, intimate communities and restorative simplicity, cozy fiction may be seen as a contemporary revival of romantic ideals. Just as romanticism provided an antidote to the soullessness of industrial modernity, so too does cozy literature provide comfort in our age of digital overload, political turbulence and cultural disintegration.

Romanticism as a Response to Industrial Modernity

The Romantic movement arose at a time when the industrial revolution was reshaping the physical and social landscapes of Europe. Smokestacks replaced forests and factories replaced rural cottages. In response, poets and thinkers turned toward what William Wordsworth called the “essential passions of the heart”, believing that the antidote to mechanical existence lay in the rediscovery of human emotion and communion with nature. Wordsworth’s *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) famously defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings,” a direct counter to the rationalist poetics of the enlightenment. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, too, emphasized imagination as the faculty that allows humankind to transcend mere logic and reconnect with spiritual truths. For Coleridge, imagination was not an escape but a means of “esemplastic” unification, binding disparate elements of life into a harmonious whole. Such harmony is precisely what cozy literature attempts to cultivate: a balance between everyday life and transcendence, between gentle conflict and emotional restoration.

Nature as Refuge

For the Romantics, nature was not merely a backdrop but an active force, a moral and spiritual teacher. Wordsworth’s *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* illustrates how natural settings could heal the mind, offering “tranquil restoration.” Similarly, Shelley in *Mont Blanc* proclaimed nature as “the everlasting universe of things,” where human thought could expand into the sublime. Lord Byron, though often ironic and restless, also turned to landscapes as mirrors of the soul, declaring in his poem *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*:

*“There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar.”*

This romantic embrace of solitary communion with nature finds a striking parallel in cozy literature. The quiet seaside cafés, bookshops by the river or sleepy villages of cozy narratives reflect the same desire to locate peace and authenticity away from industrial and urban chaos. Cozy writers, consciously or not, preserve the romantic conviction that small, pastoral worlds hold the key to human healing.

Emotion and Authenticity

Romanticism privileged the authentic expression of individual feeling against the formalism of enlightenment rationality. Shelley, in his *Defence of Poetry*, argued that poets are “the unacknowledged legislators of the world,” precisely because they articulate the emotional truths that bind humanity together. Likewise, Byron’s deeply personal confessions and Coleridge’s introspective meditations underscored the importance of emotional honesty.

Cozy literature operates on a similar principle. Unlike thrillers or grim realist novels, cozies resist cynicism, offering instead gentle emotional arcs. Their characters undergo healing not through spectacle but through empathy, community and recognition of shared vulnerability. In this, cozies replicate what Wordsworth described as poetry’s power to evoke “kindred emotion,” building bonds of sympathy between reader and character.

Community and Imagination

Another important romantic inheritance is the celebration of community and imagination. While Byron projected the solitary figure of the Byronic hero, romanticism was not devoid of communal vision. Wordsworth’s poem *Michael* celebrates the integrity of rural family life; Coleridge’s poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* dramatizes the moral necessity of recognizing human fellowship; and Shelley’s utopian vision in *Prometheus Unbound* imagines collective



Amitrakshar International Journal

of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR)

(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

liberation. Cozy literature similarly foregrounds the small community as a site of moral order and belonging. Whether in the English village of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, where every life is interconnected, or in a Japanese *iyashikei* café where strangers come to share stories, the emphasis lies on the restorative power of human connection. In both romanticism and cozies, the imagination operates not merely as escapism but as a means of reconstructing a world where compassion and creativity prevail.

Nostalgia and the Longing for Innocence

Romantic poetry was often fueled by nostalgia - a yearning for lost innocence or simpler times. Wordsworth's fascination with childhood in *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* portrays the child as closer to spiritual truth, lamenting the adult's alienation from that primal joy. Similarly, Byron's constant wanderings often betray a restless longing for a purer past.

Cozy literature sustains a comparable nostalgia. Its settings - a countryside untouched by war, a library unspoiled by modern technology, or a Japanese village where time slows, embody what Coleridge once called "that willing suspension of disbelief" that allows us to imagine innocence restored. Readers find solace in this nostalgia because it offers a vision of stability and purity absent in contemporary life.

Coziness as a Twenty-First Century Romantic Revival

Thus, cozy literature may be seen as a twenty-first century Romantic revival, adapting the ideals of the romantics to the anxieties of the digital age. Just as romanticism responded to the alienation of industrial modernity, cozies respond to the alienation of global crises, urban loneliness and the relentless pace of technology. If Byron sought solitude "in the pathless woods" and Wordsworth sought "tranquil restoration" in Tintern Abbey, today's readers seek the same in the pages of a cozy mystery or healing novel. Cozy literature is romantic not because it imitates Romantic style but because it echoes romantic values: emotion over rationalism, nature over industrialization, community over isolation and imagination over mechanical realism. In the words of Shelley, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought" and it is precisely this bittersweet recognition of loss and healing that resonates in cozy narratives. They remind us, as the Romantics once did, that literature's highest function is not to dazzle or terrify but to soothe, restore and connect us to the essential passions of the heart. Thus, cozy literature may be seen as a twenty-first century romantic revival, responding to the digital and global crises of our times in the same way romanticism responded to industrial modernity.

The Western Tradition of Cozy Literature

In the West, cozy literature is most prominently associated with cozy mysteries, a genre popularized in the twentieth century but rooted in the nineteenth-century romantic imagination.

1. Early Foundations:

The Romantic emphasis on community and nature laid the groundwork for detective fiction in rural or domestic settings. The Gothic novel, though darker in tone, introduced a fascination with atmosphere, liminality and mystery that would be domesticated in the cozy form.

2. Golden Age and Beyond:

The interwar years saw Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers shape the genre into the "whodunnit" that combined logical deduction with idyllic English villages. Christie's Miss Marple epitomizes coziness: an elderly woman embedded in her community, solving crimes not through violence but observation of human nature. These narratives reassured readers amidst political upheaval by presenting a world where order could always be restored.

3. Contemporary Western Cozies:

Modern Western cozies expand into culinary, bookshop and hobby-based mysteries, where baking, knitting or reading intertwine with gentle intrigue. Authors like Alexander McCall Smith (*The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*) universalize coziness beyond England by situating it in Botswana, though still with romantic undertones - attention to nature, local community and moral order.

The popularity of Western cozies reflects a Romantic resistance to the hyper-violent thrillers dominating crime fiction. Instead of urban grit, readers gravitate toward intimacy, nature and reassurance - echoes of Wordsworth's call to return to "the essential passions of the heart."

The Asian Embrace of Cozy Literature

While Western cozies lean toward mystery, Asian cozy literature often manifests as healing fiction or slice-of-life narratives. Yet the romantic undercurrents - nature, community, emotional authenticity remain central.

1. Japan and *Iyashikei* Fiction:

2. The Japanese literary and media tradition of *iyashikei* (healing) exemplifies the cozy turn. Works such as *Before the Coffee Gets Cold* by Toshikazu Kawaguchi or the manga/anime *Natsume's Book of Friends* emphasize quiet



Amitrakshar International Journal

of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR)

(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

interpersonal connections, nostalgic settings and gentle supernatural elements. Like Romanticism, they focus on subjective healing through memory, nature and emotion rather than action or plot.

3. South Korea and Comfort Fiction:

4. South Korean literature and web fiction frequently produce “healing novels” (*hilleong soseol*), where characters retreat from the pressures of capitalist modernity into cafés, rural inns or small communities. The romantic valorization of nature and rest appears in contemporary works that stage a resistance to Seoul’s hyper-competitive life.

5. India and Adapted Coziness:

6. While cozy fiction is less prominent as a labeled genre in India, translations of cozy mysteries and adaptations into regional languages are gaining traction. Furthermore, writers like Ruskin Bond cultivate a “cozy romanticism,” focusing on Himalayan villages, small communities and natural beauty - akin to cozy literature with Romantic nostalgia adapted to Indian contexts.

In Asia, coziness resonates as a reaction not to industrial revolution but to late modernity’s pressures: overwork, urban alienation and digital overload. Readers seek what Wordsworth once called the “soothing thoughts” offered by intimacy with nature and emotion.

Why Readers Love Cozy Literature Today

The current global popularity of cozy fiction visible in bestseller lists, book clubs and online reading communities reveals not only genre preference but also deeper psychological and cultural needs:

1. Nostalgia and Escapism:

2. Cozy fiction, like Romantic poetry, offers an imaginative escape into idealized villages, communities or cafés untouched by violence or chaos. In times of pandemic and political instability, readers long for safety.

3. Therapeutic Reading:

4. Cozy fiction functions as bibliotherapy. Its gentle pace, restorative settings and hopeful resolutions mirror the Romantic belief in literature’s healing powers.

5. Community and Connection:

6. Readers are drawn to the emphasis on friendship, empathy and communal belonging - the values undermined in an age of digital isolation.

7. Resistance to Cynicism:

8. Just as Romanticism opposed Enlightenment rationalism, cozies resist postmodern irony and hyper-realistic brutality. They affirm meaning, kindness and restorative justice.

9. Global Resonance:

10. Both Western and Asian readers find coziness appealing because it taps into universal longings: safety, beauty and belonging. It bridges cultural differences through romantic universals.

CONCLUSION

Cozy literature is more than a niche genre; it is a global cultural phenomenon that revives Romanticism for the twenty-first century. Just as Wordsworth and Keats sought solace in nature against industrial alienation, modern readers turn to village mysteries, bookshop cafés and iyashikei healing stories to resist digital fatigue and global chaos. In both Western and Asian contexts, coziness serves as a symbolic retreat, a return to emotion, intimacy and nature that Romanticism once championed. Thus, the surge of cozy literature may be read as a profound cultural return: a romantic revival disguised in teacups, cafés and gentle mysteries, reminding us that literature continues to serve as a balm for the wounded soul.

WORKS CITED

Byron, George Gordon, Lord. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*. 1812–1818. Edited by Timothy Webb, Penguin Classics, 1995.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. 1817. Edited by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Princeton UP, 1983.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. 1798. Edited by Paul Magnuson, Broadview, 2004.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *A Defence of Poetry*. 1821. Edited by Albert S. Cook, Ginn, 1891.

Shelley, Percy Bysshe. *Mont Blanc*. 1817. In *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2nd ed., W. W. Norton, 2002.

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*. 1798. Edited by Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter, Broadview, 2008.



Amitrakshar International Journal

of Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Research (AIJITR)

(A Social Science, Science and Indian Knowledge Systems Perspective)

Open-Access, Peer-Reviewed, Refereed, Bi-Monthly, International E-Journal

- Wordsworth, William. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*. 1807. In *The Major Works*, edited by Stephen Gill, Oxford UP, 2008.
- Wordsworth, William. *Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey*. 1798. In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt, 10th ed., vol. D, W. W. Norton, 2018.
- Agathocleous, Tanya. *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World*. Cambridge UP, 2011.
- Forrest, Katherine V. *The Cozy Mystery: A Feminist Reading of Genre*. Routledge, 2019.
- James, Kathryn. *Death in a Cozy Town: The Evolution of Cozy Mystery Fiction*. McFarland, 2020.
- Mellor, Anne K. *Romanticism and Gender*. Routledge, 1993.
- Morton, Timothy. *Romanticism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford UP, 2010.
- Napier, Susan J. *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. (esp. chapter on iyashikei traditions).
- Smith, Alexander McCall. *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. Anchor Books, 1998.
- Takahashi, Mizuki. "Healing, Intimacy, and Narratives of Everyday Life in Japanese *Iyashikei* Literature." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2011, pp. 589–606.
1. Wilson, Edmund. *The Romantic Turmoil: Studies in Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth*. Oxford UP, 2014.

