
Restoration, Ideologies, and Upheavals 1815-1850

Romanticism

An important artistic movement called romanticism intertwined with nationalism to further alter the influences of the Enlightenment during the 19th century. Whereas the Enlightenment often went hand in hand with classicism in the arts to emphasize reason, symmetry, and cool geometric spaces, romanticism glorified nature, emotion, and imagination. Classicism idealized models from Greek and Roman history, while romanticism sought inspiration from folklore and medieval legends. Romantics often expressed their emotions through poetry, music, and painting, and they supported many different ideologies, but they were most politically influential when they expressed nationalist feelings.

Romantics hoped to discover truth not through preoccupation with reason, but through a balance of reason with feeling, emotion, and imagination. Characteristics that romantics shared include:

An emphasis on the sentimental – Many romantic heroes and heroines were tragic figures brought down despite their inherent goodness. An important model was Werther in *The Sorrows of the Young Werther*, a novel by Johan Wolfgang von Goethe. Werther was a romantic figure who sought freedom but was misunderstood by society, most specifically by a young woman who by rejecting his love inspired his suicide.

Individualism – Whereas individualism was also an Enlightenment value, romantics emphasized rebellion against middle-class conventions. They often expressed their inner drives through unusual clothing, hairstyles, and jewelry

Interest in the past – Romantics were particularly interested in medieval history, and they inspired a revival of Gothic architecture in public buildings and pseudo-medieval castles. Medieval fairy tales were collected and published by the Grimm brothers in Germany and Hans Christian Anderson in Denmark.

Attraction to the unusual – Related to their emphasis on individualism, romantics often enjoyed the bizarre and horrifying. One manifestation was called “Gothic literature,” which focused on horror stories such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, and *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. This obsession with pursuing the extraordinary led

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some romantics to experiment with cocaine and opium to achieve altered states of consciousness.

Examining the Evidence: Romanticism in Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*

One of the most popular romantic novelists was Sir Walter Scott, a prolific writer from Edinburgh, Scotland. In the excerpt below from Chapter 1 of *Ivanhoe* (1819), Scott reflected the romantics' tendency to glorify nature and the medieval past.

“In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended in ancient times a large forest, covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster. The remains of this extensive wood are still to be seen at the noble seats of Wentworth, of Wharnccliffe Park, and around Rotherham. Here haunted of yore the fabulous Dragon of Wantley; here were fought many of the most desperate battles during the Civil Wars of the Roses; and here also flourished in ancient times those bands of gallant outlaws whose deeds have been rendered so popular in English song.”

Poetry was a favored literary form for Romantic writers, since many believed that it was the most perfect vehicle for expression of one's soul. One of the most famous masters of Gothic poetry was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose most famous work was probably *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In this poem, Coleridge related the story of a sailor cursed for killing an albatross (a large seabird). This act was depicted as a crime against nature and God that caused the sailor to feel such a sense of guilt that he eventually discovered the true beauty of nature and humanity. After his repentance, the sailor was delivered from his curse (a dead albatross around his neck), as described at the end of the poem:

O happy living things! No tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware ...
The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Other famous poets were William Blake and William Wordsworth, both

of whom emphasized the importance of seeing the beauty of the natural world. Two romantic writers lived particularly passionate, unorthodox lives that reflected their poetry: Percy Bysshe Shelley, author of *Prometheus Unbound* (a portrait of rebellion against oppressive laws and customs), who was expelled from school for advocating atheism and drowned in a storm in the Mediterranean while trying to reform the world; and Lord Byron, who championed the cause of personal liberty in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and died in Greece fighting the Turks for Greek independence.

Romanticism in Music and Painting

Another important artistic expression for romantics was music. Whereas the 18th century had been the age of classical music, 19th-century music was heavily influenced by romanticism. One of the greatest composers of all times, Ludwig van Beethoven served as a bridge between the two eras. Beethoven studied under Mozart in Vienna, and his early works were very much in the classical style. However, his Third Symphony, *Eroica*, composed for Napoleon in 1804, was a truly romantic creation with music that evoked the fear, terror, and pain that romantics so loved. Critics proclaimed his symphonies and string quartets to be philosophically profound, and audiences listened in reverential silence. He composed many moving pieces of music, including his famous Ninth Symphony, written later in life when Beethoven was totally deaf.

Romantic painters were most concerned with natural landscapes, especially as they were threatened by industrialization. For example, the German romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich depicted scenes far from cities – often in the mountains with melancholy human figures who were overpowered by the vastness of nature. Many of his landscapes had religious meaning as well, such as *The Cross in the Mountains*, which showed a Christian cross in a mountain scene, controversially detached from any formal church building. The French painter Eugene Delacroix preferred unconventional scenes of great turbulence to emphasize light and color. One of his most famous works was *Death of Sardanapalus*, based on Lord Byron's verse account of the decadent Assyrian king who ordered that his harem women and valued horses go to their death with him.

Romanticism and Ideology

Romanticism appealed to people of virtually every political ideology. Conservatives saw romantic values as a powerful rejection of Enlightenment

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rationalism that had led to the disastrous consequences of the French Revolution and Napoleon's conquests. They also appreciated the romantic attachment to the Middle Ages, a time when custom and religion were still highly respected. On the other hand, radicals admired the unconventional impulses of the romantics, which were necessary for anyone who wanted to help create a new society free from the shackles of the past. In Germany and England many romantics had, like Wordsworth, initially welcomed the French Revolution only to change their minds as the Reign of Terror began. On the other hand, the French writer Victor Hugo became an influential advocate of radical change. Though extremely conservative in his youth, Hugo moved to radicalism as the decades passed; he became a passionate supporter of republicanism, and his work touched upon most of the political and social issues and artistic trends of his time. He was known in France for his poetry, but his best known works outside France were two novels: *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.