

LESSON 5

Romanticism and Realism

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can innovation affect ways of life?
- How does revolution bring about political and economic change?

READING HELPDISK

Academic Vocabulary

- individuality
- approach

Content Vocabulary

- romanticism
- secularization
- natural selection
- realism

TAKING NOTES

Key Ideas and Details

Listing Examples Use a table like this one to list examples of literature from the romantic and realist movements.

Romanticism	Realism

IT MATTERS BECAUSE

Romanticism was a response to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Romantics believed that emotions, rather than reason, should guide them. By the mid-nineteenth century, romanticism had given way to a new movement called realism. Realists focused on the everyday world and ordinary people.

Romanticism

GUIDING QUESTION *How did the ideas of romanticism differ from those of the Enlightenment?*

At the end of the 1700s, a new intellectual movement, known as **romanticism**, emerged as a reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment had stressed reason as the chief means for discovering truth. The romantics emphasized feelings, emotion, and imagination as sources of knowing.

Romantics valued individualism, or the belief in the uniqueness of each person. Many romantics rebelled against middle-class conventions. Male romantics grew long hair and beards, and men and women often wore outrageous clothes in order to express their **individuality**.

Many romantics had a passionate interest in past ages, especially the Middle Ages. Romantic architects revived medieval styles and built castles, cathedrals, city halls, parliamentary buildings, and railway stations in a style called neo-Gothic. The British Houses of Parliament in London are a prime example of this architectural style.

Romanticism in Art and Music

Romantic artists shared at least two features. First, to them, all art was a reflection of the artist's inner feelings. A painting should mirror the artist's vision of the world and be the instrument of the artist's imagination. Second, romantic artists abandoned classical reason for warmth and emotion.

Eugène Delacroix (DEH • luh • KWAH) was one of the most famous romantic painters from France. His paintings showed two chief characteristics: a fascination with the exotic and a passion for color. His works reflect his belief that “a painting is to be a feast to the eye.”

In music, too, romantic trends dominated the first half of the nineteenth century. One of the most famous composers of this era was Ludwig van Beethoven. Beethoven’s early work fell largely within the classical form of the eighteenth century. However, his *Third Symphony* embodied the elements of romanticism with powerful melodies that created dramatic intensity. For Beethoven, music had to reflect his deepest feelings: “I *must* write—for what weighs on my heart I *must* express.”

Romanticism in Literature

The literary arts were deeply affected by the romantic interest in the past. Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, for example, a best seller in the early nineteenth century, told of clashes between knights in medieval England. Many romantic writers chose medieval subjects and created stories that expressed their strong nationalism.

An attraction to the exotic and unfamiliar gave rise to Gothic literature. Chilling examples are Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* in Britain and Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories of horror in the United States. Some romantics even sought the unusual in their own lives. They explored their dreams and nightmares and sought to create altered states of consciousness.

The romantics viewed poetry as the direct expression of the soul. Romantic poetry gave expression to one of the most important characteristics of romanticism—its love of nature. Romantics believed that nature served as a mirror into which humans could look to learn about themselves. This is especially evident in the poetry of William Wordsworth, the foremost English romantic poet of nature. His experience of nature was almost mystical:

PRIMARY SOURCE

“One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.”

—William Wordsworth, from *The Tables Turned*

The worship of nature also caused Wordsworth and other romantic poets to be critical of eighteenth-century science, which, they believed, had reduced nature to a cold object of study. To Wordsworth, the scientists’ dry, mathematical **approach** left no room for the imagination or for the human soul. The English poet William Blake, a contemporary of Wordsworth, frequently criticized the abuse of class power and the damaging effects of the Industrial Revolution on both people and nature itself. Many romantics were convinced that industrialization would cause people to become alienated, both from their inner selves and from the natural world.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Drawing Conclusions How did science and industrialization contribute to the development of romanticism’s celebration of nature?



▲ *Battle of Poitiers* by Eugène Delacroix, 1830

CRITICAL THINKING

Interpreting Significance Why might Delacroix have chosen to depict a scene from a French battle from 1356?

romanticism an intellectual movement that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century in reaction to the ideas of the Enlightenment; it stressed feelings, emotion, and imagination as sources of knowing

individuality the quality that distinguishes an individual from others

approach the way or method in which one examines or studies an issue or a concept

From Mendeleev to Particle Physics

Dmitry Mendeleev's discovery of recurring patterns in the properties of chemical elements is one of the foundations of modern chemistry. In 1869 when he proposed his periodic law, 70 elements were known. Before his death in 1907, Mendeleev saw his predictions of the existence of several previously unknown elements confirmed. Since that time, many more elements have been discovered, bringing the total up to well over 100 today. Although electrons were discovered before Mendeleev died, he had no idea of the complexity of the subatomic world, in which scientists have discovered more than 200 types of subatomic particles.

secularization indifference to or rejection of religion or religious consideration

natural selection the principle that some organisms are more adaptable to the environment than others

realism a mid-nineteenth century movement that rejected romanticism and sought to portray lower- and middle-class life as it actually was

New Age of Science

GUIDING QUESTION How did advances in science influence life during the Industrial Revolution?

The Scientific Revolution had created a modern, rational approach to the study of the natural world. For a long time, only the educated elite understood its importance. With the Industrial Revolution, however, came a heightened interest in scientific research. By the 1830s, new discoveries in science had led to benefits that affected all Europeans. Science came to have a greater and greater impact on people.

In biology, the Frenchman Louis Pasteur proposed the germ theory of disease, which was crucial to the development of modern scientific medical practices. In chemistry, the Russian Dmitry Mendeleev in the 1860s classified all the material elements then known on the basis of their atomic weights. In physics, British scientist and inventor Michael Faraday put together a primitive generator that laid the foundation for the use of electric current.

Dramatic material benefits such as these led Europeans to have a growing faith in science. This faith, in turn, undermined the religious faith of many people. It is no accident that the nineteenth century was an age of increasing **secularization**, indifference to or rejection of religion in the affairs of the world. For many people, truth was now to be found in science and the concrete material existence of humans.

More than anyone else, it was Charles Darwin who promoted the idea that humans are material beings who are part of the natural world. In 1859 Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. The basic idea of this book was that each species, or kind, of plant and animal had evolved over a long period of time from earlier, simpler forms of life. Darwin called this principle organic evolution.

How did this natural process work? According to Darwin, in every species, "many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive," which results in a "struggle for existence." Darwin believed that some organisms are born with variations, or differences, that make them more adaptable to their environment than other organisms, a process that Darwin called **natural selection**.

Those organisms that are naturally selected for survival reproduce and thrive. This is known as "survival of the fittest." In this process, the unfit do not survive. The fit that survive pass on the variations that enabled them to survive until, according to Darwin, a new, separate species emerges. In *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, Darwin argued that human beings had animal origins and were not an exception to the rule governing the development of other species.

Darwin's ideas raised a storm of controversy. Some people did not take his ideas seriously. Other people objected that Darwin's theory made human beings ordinary products of nature rather than unique creations of God. Others were bothered by his idea of life as a mere struggle for survival. Some believers felt Darwin had not acknowledged God's role in creation. Some detractors scorned Darwin and depicted him unfavorably in cartoons. Gradually, however, many scientists and other intellectuals came to accept Darwin's theory. His theory changed thinking in countless fields from biology to anthropology.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Predicting Consequences Why might the scientific developments described in this lesson lead to increased secularization?

Realism

GUIDING QUESTION What factors contributed to the movement known as realism?

The belief that the world should be viewed realistically, a view often expressed after 1850, was closely related to the scientific outlook of the time. In politics, Bismarck practiced the “politics of reality.” In the literary and visual arts, **realism** also became a movement.

The literary realists of the mid-nineteenth century rejected romanticism. They wanted to write about ordinary characters from life, not romantic heroes in exotic settings. They also tried to avoid emotional language by using precise description. They preferred novels to poems. Many literary realists combined their interest in everyday life with an examination of social issues. These artists expressed their social views through the characters in their novels.

The French author Gustave Flaubert, who was a leading novelist of the 1850s and 1860s, perfected the realist novel. His work *Madame Bovary* presents a critical description of small-town life in France. In Great Britain, Charles Dickens became a huge success with novels that showed the realities of life for the lower and middle classes in the early Industrial Age. Novels such as *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* created a vivid picture of the brutal life of London’s poor.

In art, too, realism became dominant after 1850. Realist artists sought to show the everyday life of ordinary people and the world of nature with photographic realism. The French became leaders in realist painting.

The French painter Gustave Courbet was the most famous artist of the realist school. He loved to portray scenes from everyday life. His subjects were factory workers and peasants. “I have never seen either angels or goddesses, so I am not interested in painting them,” Courbet once commented. To Courbet, no subject was too ordinary.

READING PROGRESS CHECK

Predicting Consequences Why might the work of realists, like Charles Dickens, have inspired social reform?



▲ *Girl with Seagulls* by Gustave Courbet, 1865

CRITICAL THINKING

Comparing and Contrasting

In what ways does this painting illustrate Courbet’s rejection of romanticism?

LESSON 5 REVIEW

Reviewing Vocabulary

1. **Describing** How did the concepts of natural selection and secularization demonstrate a changing worldview?

Using Your Notes

2. **Contrasting** Using examples from your graphic organizer of literary works, write a paragraph contrasting the characteristics of romanticism and realism in literature.

Answering the Guiding Questions

3. **Contrasting** How did the ideas of romanticism differ from those of the Enlightenment?

4. **Identifying Cause and Effect** How did advances in science influence life during the Industrial Revolution?

5. **Identifying Cause and Effect** What factors contributed to the movement known as realism?

Writing Activity

6. **Narrative** Write a paragraph describing some key event in your life using the style of the romantics or the realists.