



The Romantics

A summary of romanticism, looking at those who participated and their works.

ROMANTICISM

"A movement in the arts and literature which originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual. Often contrasted with classicism." – Oxford English Dictionary

An Overview

Romanticism was a movement that lasted from about 1750 to 1870, it moved all around Europe and America too. France was one of the last countries for the Romantic Movement to reach, arriving in 1820. The basic idea of the Romantic Movement was to revolt against precise order, in the literary sense. The movement favoured creativity and imagination over logic.

The movement was supported by numerous different poets including the likes of: William Blake, William Wordsworth and Percy Shelley. They created works that were against the grain in terms of their disregard of common dogmas of eighteenth and nineteenth century writing.

Neoclassicism was another movement that came before the Romantic Movement and was one that believed in order, simplicity and logic. Romanticism came as a more creative revolt against this reason.

It was the German poet Friedrich Schlegel who is widely accredited with first using the term romantic to describe literature. His description of this term was "literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form."

Beliefs of Romanticism

The beliefs of this revolt were mainly focussed on creativity. One part to their beliefs was individualism. They viewed the individual as the most important link between others. Many writers and poets of the movement created work that was reflective of personal experience but depicted and described many major universal themes of the time, such as war.

The way in which many of the romantic poets previously mentioned depicted nature in a very violent, powerful and vivid way. Many painters depicted nature as horrific. For



Figure 1: 'The Raft of the Medusa'

example, Théodore Géricault's Painting 'The Raft of the Medusa' was a vivid depiction of the destructive capabilities of the sea and. The Romantics also explored more extremely than ever before emotions within their work. They looked at more than just the subject's likeness but also at their emotional state, this belief was more prevalent in art than writing but still important none the less.

Overall the general belief of the romantics was against the grain, they created reverence for the natural world, emotional passion and an interest in the supernatural.

Romantic Poets

As aforementioned there were numerous British poets that not only participated in the movement but also pushed it along somewhat.

William Blake

As described by William Blake, the movement of Romanticism made it possible for poetry to become an 'embodiment of the writer's imagination or vision'. William Blake's poetry, like many other poets of the romantic movement was very much influenced by the war taking place between England and France. He composed 'All Religions Are One', in an attempt to help the public think about more about their spiritual life. The poem 'And did those feet in ancient time' was written by William Blake, it has since become a song with music composed by Sir Hubert Parry, it is commonly thought of as a Christian Hymn however it is not, this is because it is not a song of praise. This poem is very much a romantic poem. The lines:

'Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!

'Bring me my chariot of fire'

very much embody the idea that Blake held great importance over imagination and liberty.

Percy Shelley

Ozymandias is a romantic poem written by Percy Shelley, it is romantic in the way it portrays nature, it depicts nature as powerful force. Percy's work is similar to Theodore Gericault's in its portrayal of nature. The general theme of Ozymandias is that a king named Ozymandias attempted to show his power to the divine. However, over time his statue and the city surrounding it, has been devastated. The idea of the poem being that no one can combat nature in the eventuality of time.

William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth alongside Samuel Taylor Coleridge produced the joint publication Lyrical Ballads, this publication is widely regarded as the first romantic publication.

William Wordsworth's romantic beliefs are somewhat summarized in this quotation:

"Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart."

His poetry was romantic in its very form. The prelude is a book by Wordsworth that is an exceptionally long piece about his individual experiences. This is very romantic in the sense that the movement focused, as previously mentioned, on individualism.

Romanticism and The Gothic tradition

Just as the Romantic poetry was written to trigger deep emotions so too was the Gothic fiction. The gothic tradition is somewhat of a more extreme branch of romanticism. The tradition sought to create a pleasing terror and thrill from writing. This was achieved by emphasizing on 'taboo' subjects of the time, such as science vs religion; science vs religion is a common theme in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Both of these literary movements displayed a fascination of the supernatural, something too found in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.