Romanticism and Realism

**GUIDE TO READING**

**The BIG Idea**

New Technologies Artistic movements are influenced by the society around them. Romanticism was in part a reaction to the Industrial Revolution, while advances in science contributed to a new movement called realism.

**Content Vocabulary**

- romanticism (p. 638)
- secularization (p. 641)
- organic evolution (p. 642)
- natural selection (p. 642)
- realism (p. 643)

**Academic Vocabulary**

- individuality (p. 638)
- approach (p. 641)

**People and Places**

- Ludwig van Beethoven (p. 639)
- Louis Pasteur (p. 641)
- Charles Darwin (p. 641)
- Charles Dickens (p. 643)

**Reading Strategy**

**Summarizing Information**

As you read, use a table like the one below to list popular literature from the romantic and realist movements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Romanticism</th>
<th>Realism</th>
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Romanticism was a reaction to the Enlightenment and to 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**

**MAIN IDEA** In the arts, romanticism stressed individualism and emotion instead of the Enlightenment’s focus on universalism and reason.

**HISTORY & YOU** Do you and your friends dress differently from your parents? Perhaps you are expressing your individuality, as the romantics did in their time. Read to learn what romantics of the eighteenth century valued.

At the end of the eighteenth century, 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.

The romantics believed that emotion and sentiment were only understandable to the person experiencing them. In their novels, romantic writers created figures who were often misunderstood and rejected by society but who continued to believe in their own worth through their inner feelings.

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

Many romantics had a passionate interest in the past ages, especially the medieval era. They felt it had a mystery and interest in the soul that their own industrial age did not. Romantic architects revived medieval styles and built castles, cathedrals, city halls, parliamentary buildings, and even 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 own 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 should be a feast to the eye.”

Many of Delacroix’s paintings depicted scenes of uprisings against tyrants. His most influential work is perhaps Liberty Leading the People. In this painting, a woman holding a red banner is the symbol of liberty. She is leading revolutionaries forward during battle. After his travels to Spain and North Africa, Delacroix painted the animals he had seen there. The Lion Hunt is a good example of his later subjects.

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. Some have called him a bridge between classical and romantic music. Others argue that he was such a rare genius he cannot be easily classified.
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.

In one way, Beethoven was definitely a romantic. He thought of himself as an artist, not a craftsman. He had an intense and difficult personality but was committed to writing music that reflected his deepest feelings. “I must write, for what weighs on my heart, I must express.”

### Scientific Advancements Leading Up to the Publication of *Frankenstein*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1798</td>
<td>First large-scale smallpox vaccinations</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>Invention of the battery</td>
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<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>First practical steam locomotive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>First electric light</td>
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<tr>
<td>1816</td>
<td>Invention of the stethoscope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td><em>Frankenstein</em> published</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Romanticism in Literature

Like the visual arts, the literary arts were deeply affected by romanticism and reflected a romantic interest in the past. Sir Walter Scott’s *Ivanhoe*, for example, a best-seller in the early 1800s, 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 *Frankenstein*.

“Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious [disgusting] handiwork, horror-stricken. He would hope that left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation [life], would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient [short] existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life.”

—Mary Shelley, about her monster in her book *Frankenstein*

### DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

Shelley’s 1818 novel reflects the romantics’ reaction to scientific advances.

1. **Summarizing** Based on the excerpt, how did Shelley feel about her monster?
2. **Making Connections** Can you connect the time line events and Shelley’s quote?
in Britain and Edgar Allen 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 altered states of consciousness.

For the true romantic, poetry was the ideal art form. 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.

Wordsworth’s 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

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 human soul was a source of expression for William Blake, a poet and artist connected with romanticism. Blake’s Songs of Innocence, read in conjunction with his Songs of Experience, express what Blake called “the two contrary states of the human soul.”

Many romantics were convinced that industrialization would cause people to become alienated from their inner selves and from the natural world. This idea shows up in Mary Shelley’s novel Frankenstein: When science dares to try and conquer nature, a monster is created.

✓ Reading Check  Examining  How did the popularity of Ivanhoe reflect the interests of the nineteenth century?

New Age of Science

Main Idea  Rapid advances in science and technology fueled industrial growth, made medical care more effective, and challenged religious faith.

HISTORY & YOU  When you get sick, do you take antibiotics to kill the germs? Learn how discoveries, such as the existence of germs, changed society in the 1800s.

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 many practical benefits that affected all Europeans. Science came to have a greater and greater impact on people.

New Discoveries

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 Mendeleyev in the 1860s classified all the material elements then known on the basis of their atomic weights. In Great Britain, 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.

Charles Darwin

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, Charles Darwin published his book 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.” This 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 (“survival of the fittest”) reproduce and thrive. 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 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. “Is there a place in the Darwinian world for moral values?” they asked. 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 Check**

1. **Describing** How did the theory of natural selection influence the way people saw the world?

French realist Gustave Courbet preferred to portray the common people, as here in *The Stonebreakers* (1849) where workers are repairing a road.

1. **Contrasting** In what ways does this painting illustrate Courbet’s rejection of romanticism?

2. **Interpreting** What do you think was Courbet’s goal in portraying a scene?
Realism

The rise of science encouraged writers and artists to create realistic works that portrayed even the poor and degraded in society.

HISTORY & YOU Do you enjoy lifelike video games? What details make these games so realistic? Learn about the details that created realism in nineteenth century art and literature.

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

Realism in Literature

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 their characters.

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 poor 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, as well as of their humor and humanity. In fact, his characters were so sympathetic that they helped inspire social reform.

Realism in Art

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 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. There were those who objected to Courbet’s “cult of ugliness” and who found such scenes of human misery scandalous. To Courbet, however, no subject was too ordinary, too harsh, or too ugly.

Reading Check Evaluating What factors helped to produce the movement known as realism?

Vocabulary


Main Ideas

2. List the values of the romantics.
3. Summarize the discoveries that scientists made in the mid-nineteenth century by using a chart like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scientist</th>
<th>Discovery</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pasteur</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mendeleyev</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faraday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
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4. Explain why Charles Dickens’s novels helped inspire social reform.

Critical Thinking

5. The BIG Idea Comparing and Contrasting How did romanticism compare to the ideas of the Enlightenment?
6. Assessing How did scientific developments affect the cultural movements of the nineteenth century?
7. Analyzing Visuals Compare Delacroix’s Prisoner of Chillon on page 639 with The Stonebreakers on page 642. From the paintings, how would you explain why we say that Delacroix is a romantic, and Courbet is a realist?

Writing About History

8. Expository Writing Read poetry by two different poets of romanticism. Write a paper describing the elements of romanticism found in the poems. Be sure to include quotations.