

Art History of the 19th Century And The Influence Of The French Revolution

Posted on September 13, 2018

One of the most influential revolutions in Europe in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the French Revolution. The French Revolution was the most dynamic revolution of its time because it gained active participation from the French population. Because of this and many other factors, it has impacted the nature of politics and how society interacted socially, culturally, and even literally wholly transformed. The following arose under the ideals of the French Revolution, which demanded freedom and equality above all other things. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, n.d.; Musée du Louvre, n.d.)

This was in the line of breaking the king's dominance over society, which, in the day, took a very totalitarian form of administration. The gap between the rich, who were the monarchs, and the poor, who were now in resistance, was alluringly huge, hence offsetting the course for resistance. The church was another faction that had an extravagance of resources in this period. The clergy extended special privileges at the expense of the common man; hence, the revolutionary ideals spun around these two institutions. Romanticism took root as the driving force of this struggle, and for the first time, the demands of an uprising took an abstract nature. People were demanding for practical Human rights, inspired by nationalism they also demanded citizenship and the privileges it comes with such as fundamental freedoms. There were also ideologies of social equality, which sought to bridge the gap between the elite and non-elite in society. Many in the society then had much to relate to the ongoing revolution. The artists in the society were deeply motivated by the cry of the society, with the poets taking the day with how they presented their plight.

The French Revolution developed a series of phases. Ideology first consumed the first and second-generation romantics in society. An example of poets in the first generation is Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, and the influential William Wordsworth. At first, Lake District, which was the most renowned institution for poets, sympathized with the philosophy that William Godwin was trying to pass in his passages, such as the inquiry into political justice. The revolution, however, had its own set of turns, and the romantics also took different appeals of writing poetry, most of whom turned conservative after the revolution erupted, claiming lives, some of which brutally. An example of such a poet was Wordsworth. The contribution of such a writer should not be downplayed, as his contemporary work played a vital role in amassing the so-called common man into the heart of the matter, which kept the revolution alive amidst the bloody suppression. Wordsworth and Coleridge used principles such as equality in what is now called 'the language of the common man.' By addressing the low subject matters in great works such as Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth brought down the barriers that existed in poetry. Such restrictions were created by focusing such art on appeasing the elite in society, but now, great work revolves around the common man, hence planting the

notions of equality.

The French Revolution is a classic example of the great extent to which progressively developed ideology, as motivated by cultural perceptions, can go to offset the status quo of power and control of such a society. When it comes to the political arena, such ideals have a more significant appeal to the common man, who is often in the lower class of many societies. This is because such an individual's life is keener on following traditionalism and the norms that have been passed down to them. Such then became a nerve point for idealists, and exploiting it created the wave of Romanticism as expressed in the French Revolution.

It is clear that the 19th-century Romantic movements were influenced by the French Revolution to a great extent. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004; Poetry Foundation, n.d.-a) That said, the 18th-century poets had to deal not only with external influences but also with the revolution occurring in France. Poetry reflected the social turmoil sweeping across Europe as well as the wishes and worries of the poets. To show the relationship between poetry and the French Revolution, we examine three prolific English Romantics, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, as well as their involvement in the revolution and how it was presented in the poems.

Wordsworth

Wordsworth's political and social life is shared in the poem "Tintern Abby," where he recollects the experiences he had in France after he had revisited the region in 1791. His perception changes after he becomes friends with Beaupuis and comes across a hungry and sick girl who is starving because of the country's status quo. This encounter saddened Wordsworth's heart and changed his political ideas. He became an active advocate for the revolution and emitted a lot of energy and enthusiasm but forgot to account for the abstract principle of human rights. His attention shifted, and he became more interested in politics and government than ever in England. This is attributable to his connection to the French cause and the people. However, as the revolution progressed, Wordsworth became depressed and disillusioned, falling short of his expectations.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Coleridge is another poet who was affected by the French Revolution in the 18th century. (Poetry Foundation, n.d.-b) He was not physically involved in the revolution, but like his colleague Wordsworth, he was a thinker of the imaginative and emotional as opposed to the ratiocinative order. In most cases, these two poets are often grouped together, but Coleridge was more welcoming of ideas about human affairs. Coleridge and Wordsworth portrayed enthusiasm and emotions, but the former did so from a religious perspective.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Shelley is the third poet who was affected by the French Revolution. (Poetry Foundation, n.d.-c) He viewed the revolution as an unrestrained indictment of the past, which embraced tyrannical forms of government, such as priests and kings. The revolution would shape the future with its perfected humanity. Shelley was fascinated by the changes the revolution would bring, and he decided to share his excitement through his poetry. He often used his emotions to express his point. The poem “Queen Mab” is an excellent example of how Shelley employs feelings of anger to express his political ideas.

From the precedent, everyone in Europe suffered the effects of the French Revolution; the only question is to what extent it affected the lives of particular individuals. By exploring the works of eighteenth-century poets, it is clear that revolution was an idea even in different countries. By being a romance writer, the poets had to react to everything happening around them, and one of these was the French Revolution. The revolution involved a vast scope than had ever been seen, and as such, there were many complaints. Since the revolution was all about change, talking, complaining, and writing was necessary, or else the revolution could not have taken place. Poetry and writing were important forms of expressing emotional and political ideas, and as such, they were as crucial to the French Revolution as the revolution was essential for eighteenth-century writers. Indeed, words and communication media mattered in the French Revolution unprecedentedly.

References

Musée du Louvre. (n.d.). *Jacques-Louis David*.

<https://www.louvre.fr/en/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions/jacques-louis-david>

Poetry Foundation. (n.d.-a). *William Wordsworth*.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth>

Poetry Foundation. (n.d.-b). *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/samuel-taylor-coleridge>

Poetry Foundation. (n.d.-c). *Percy Bysshe Shelley*.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/percy-bysshe-shelley>

The Metropolitan Museum of Art. (2004). *Romanticism*.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/romanticism>