

The mind is an entity full of intricacies, yet it is also an individual's ability to create anything and everything that may not exist within the confines of our physical world. Within our minds there lies an entirely new world. Within our minds there lies imagination. The imagination has transported avid thinkers and artists. During the Romantic Movement, the thoughts and emotions of an individual drove the art and literature, and the Victorian period that followed focused on capturing a romanticized scene of nineteenth century England. What was truly behind the Romantic and Victorian periods, and what is the story behind the paint on a canvas and pages of a book? What was the raw material that compelled these artists?

Romanticism existed from approximately 1800 to 1840, philosophy and art working in tandem with literary exploration (Engell). Romanticism was "more than vague 'inspiration', the imagination became the way to grasp the truth" (Engell 4). Philosophers, people searching for the "purest means of expression" (Engell 139), sought this truth. The era of Romanticism emphasized the freedom of a creative mind and the subconscious, heightening the power of intellectual perception of the world we inhabit. Such notions were captured in an author's musings, as well as dramatic imagery in visual works of art. "Imagination gives reason a language and the ability to appear in concrete forms" (Engell 48). Imagination is the creative force that extends one's views on the world and offers the significance of invention ("Imagination"). Reason is the explanation of the mind's quandaries, whereas imagination is the mind's ability to utilize such explanation and form new ideas ("Reason").

This movement sculpted literary wonders, birthing individuals whose imaginations surpassed those of their comrades. Such figures are proclaimed "The Romantics," for they developed an idealized world within their imaginations, cherishing the artistic mind and the organic purity of nature. The Romantics yearned for an escape from the mechanization and urbanization that was progressively gaining power in an otherwise simplistic world (*The Romantics*). The Industrial Revolution that struck Europe was a movement that took place in the late 18th and early 19th century (Kreis). Mechanization was progressively gaining popularity and importance in the world, and everyone was affected. Yet this movement did not only imply the rise of machines and productivity, it introduced the concept of the working class. New social relationships were formed due to this shift, and "man no longer treated men as men, but a commodity which could be bought and sold on the open market" (Kreis). The concept of humanity was disappearing, and society became entirely focused on urban progression and industrialization. With the introduction of these concepts, art and the imagination were decreasing in popularity, a factor that The Romantics were attempting to fight (Kreis).

One figure who embraced such modes of imagination was poet and painter William Blake. As a young boy Blake "dreamed of a very different world" (*The Romantics*), a world in which he believed he saw through heavenly visions, a world of "trees filled with angelic beauty" (*The Romantics*). Blake regarded the childhood imagination to be imperative to an individual's growth as well as that of a nation. He witnessed the injustices within society that pertained to the treatment of children, recounting traumatic observations of child labor and general injustices to this naïve population (*The Romantics*). Such poignant recounts were crafted and compiled to become his series "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" (*The Romantics*). Within this collection of poetry, Blake extrapolates on the virtue that coincides with childhood, yet he also declares the weakness such innocence holds when faced with the dominance of industrial society (*The Romantics*). At the age of thirty, Blake was faced with the devastating death of his brother. Blake stated that he was "obliged to find joy in the human world" (*The Romantics*); the death of his brother revealed his loneliness in a world that he failed to understand. Blake's life soon

became filled with advocacy for the human identity, and he became consumed with a deep yearning for a life detached from the confinements of modern society, a yearning for a simpler life (*The Romantics*). The concept of the imagination became increasingly important to Blake, and he wrote, “the imagination combines the ‘cosmic, political, religious, personal, and poetic’” (Engell 48). He believed that Christianity and Victorian England taught individuals primarily about physical pleasures, implying little knowledge to one’s imagination and creativity. He despised such practices for they were repressing one’s spirit and destroying one’s soul (“William”). In William Blake’s “London” he writes,

*“I wander thro’ each charter’d street,
Near where the charter’d Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.*

*In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg’d manacles I hear*

*How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black’ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls*

*But most thro’ midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse”*

In this poem, Blake is expressing his distaste for modern society. The line, “How the Chimney-sweepers cry/ Every black’ning Church appalls” is referring to the chimneysweepers, a group of children who were forced into manual labor, thus risking their lives (Feldman). In the last stanza “But most thro’ midnight streets I hear ... And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse” Blake is referring to the corruption of children in society, as well as insulting the concept of marriage, introducing the notion that marriage may be destroying love rather than embracing it (Feldman). In general, this poem focuses on Blake’s anger at the institutions and the general race of mankind.

William Wordsworth also found himself searching for what he commonly proclaimed to be “emotion” (*The Romantics*). Such search guided him on a journey to the Alps, where he believed that the farther he journeyed, the closer he came to his inspiration. “The natural world was something more than a retreat from private pain and disappointment, it was the power at the heart of his imagination, the romantic imagination, yet it could also connect him with eternity” (*The Romantics*). The solitude and inspiration that nature provided fed his imagination as well as his recognition of the forces far more powerful than mankind (*The Romantics*). Wordsworth also found inspiration in monuments created by the hands of man as opposed to nature, but such monuments were now ruins, reminders of the past. “Romantics were half in love with ruins, they

were the symbols of ancient times, forgotten and decayed. They cast their shadows over the new mechanical world of the Industrial Revolution” (*The Romantics*).

Tintern Abbey was rediscovered in the late eighteenth century and held in high regard, for it was beautifully preserved and remained with all walls intact as well as some windows with “gothic tracery” (“Tintern”). Ivy and other vegetation adhered to a lot of the ruins, demonstrating the relationship between nature and man that fascinated The Romantics (“Tintern”). Tintern Abbey was more than ruins, however. It spoke of a simpler time and evoked nostalgia for the life it once had. Wordsworth fell in love with Tintern Abbey, proclaiming it to be a “reminder of a more harmonious, pre-Industrial past” and “a moment out of time” (*The Romantics*). Such musings are captured in an extended poem written when Wordsworth was four miles above Tintern Abbey. Within this piece of literature Wordsworth paints a portrait of the sublimity and harmony present, reveling in its beauty but shuddering at the world that lay beyond. He writes, “Five year has past; five summers with length ... Once again / Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, / Which on a wild secluded scene impress / Thoughts of more deep seclusion” (Wordsworth). Wordsworth states that it has been five years since he has seen the beauty of Tintern Abbey. He describes the majestic nature that surrounds him and his appreciation for its tranquility. Wordsworth further contemplates humanity’s relationship with nature and his personal nostalgia when he writes, “I bounded o’er the hills; when like a roe / I bounded o’er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams / ... For I have learned / To look on nature, not as in the hour / Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes / The still, sad music of humanity” (Wordsworth). Wordsworth speaks of his youth, the way in which he would carelessly run over mountains and hills, and compares it to where he currently stands. He no longer maintains the naïveté of childhood, but instead the wisdom of a man who is aware of one’s affects on the world we inhabit.

Romanticism was a movement that focused on the imagination and the beauty of nature, as well as a revolt against the Industrial Age (Kreis). Yet such struggle and reactions were not only present in works of literature by poets such as William Blake and William Wordsworth; they were also incorporated in visual artwork. A vast majority of the artwork of this time illustrated such mentality, but it also reflected other movements that were occurring simultaneously. The Romantic era produced artwork and literature of its own, as well as intermingling with other periods. The latter end of the Romanticism saw the birth of the Victorian era, which spanned the reign of Queen Victoria, thus commencing in 1837 and ending in 1901 (“Victorian”). The Victorian Age shared similarities with the Romantics in a great deal of their art and literature. The Victorian period gave birth to an age of prolific art as well as literature, both exploring people as a society and an individual’s placement in it (“Victorian”). The Victorian Age saw the beginnings of extreme segregation between social standings in society. Though the concepts of “upper class” and “working class” had already been established in the early nineteenth century, their roles became progressively stressed as the Victorian period progressed (Cody). The upper class became increasingly powerful, holding the privilege of controlling the political system. Within this fragmentation of society an individual was to remain in their position of class, for it was very rare to move up in regimented Victorian society (Cody).

Victorian painter William Powell Frith created a vast amount of narrative paintings in which he depicted modern society. Such paintings include the renowned *The Derby Day* in which he illustrates people congregating to watch the Derby Horse races.



William Powell Frith
The Derby Day, 1858
 Oil on Canvas

In this work, he constructs characters and scenarios, incorporating diverse narratives within the painting. The characters that he created are very expressive, and upon close speculation, one can see the “neglected mistress, whose bored lover – a ‘vicious voluptuary’ – lolls against their carriage, and the foolish youth in top hat and checked trousers who has lost his money, watch and shirt studs to a gang of thimble riggers” (Knight 59). Every individual in the painting is granted a dramatic story, collectively creating an illustration of Victorian society. In his paintings, Frith combines a mixture of classes, figures of both wealthy and impoverished (Knight). In the Victorian period such inclusion of diversity within crowds was becoming prominent for “it was important to envision a crowd that was differentiated rather than made up of masses of identical units” (Knight 84). Frith’s recognition also lies in the deliberate craft that he exhibits in the creation of forms upon the canvas. Each brushstroke and addition of color further sculpts a form, creating an individual that is of the utmost beauty. Frith paintings effectively create a form in relation to its space. Frith used models for his paintings, incorporating these diverse sketches into one cohesive piece (Knight). His models are commonly poised in dramatic motions and scenes, similar to the exaggeration used by The Romantics. Through such paintings, these individuals come to life and initiate a prologue to their story, thus evoking mystery and intrigue that forever remains in the work. Frith’s work serves as snapshots into Victorian society, as well as representations of the beauty and artistry of painting in the Victorian era. Frith’s work differs from that of other Victorian painters in that he does not attempt to mask the truths present in society. Instead, he exposes the wealthy and sheds light on the impoverished, frequently including them together in one scene (*The Victorians*). Yet these scenes present neither melancholy tones nor cheerful ones; instead, as Frith said “it may not be beautiful, but this is the stuff of life” (*The Victorians*).

Romanticism and the study of the individual found their way into the work of painter John Everett Millais. Millais engaged in the mindset of Romanticism, and is considered to be a Romantic himself (Newall). This appreciation for the past and yearn for simplicity was the catalyst for his founding of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood along with Dante Gabriel Rossetti

and William Holman Hunt (Landow). The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was founded in an attempt to revitalize the arts as well as revive artistic styles and practices of the past (Landow). One such work in which Millais explores historical content is in his painting *Ophelia*.



John Everett Millais
Ophelia, 1851
 Oil on Canvas

This painting depicts Shakespeare's character, Ophelia, in her death. Despite such melancholy content, Millais created it with such delicate renderings that it appears nearly magical. The general public, however, did not adopt this attitude and instead rejected it, believing the gaping form to be inappropriate for depicting Ophelia's death and Millais' skill to be full of naïve enthusiasm and inexperience ("Millais"). Millais' other work is not as controversial and commonly depicts figures in the midst of a narrative. When compared to the work of William Powell Frith, though, these narratives are more subtle and with few figures consuming the panels.

The imagination is a concept that has infatuated individuals for centuries. During the Romantic era it proved to be exceptionally prevalent, consuming the minds of philosophers as well as the art and literature. During the Victorian period the imagination caused artists to consider their place in society as well as question the entire social construct.

Today, we examine the words of William Wordsworth and William Blake, as well as the paintings that infatuated William Frith and John Everett Millais. Yet these works are merely the finished product, and we are ignorant as to what ideas exercised their imaginations in the process. I began to inquire what words these artists wrote and deserted as well as what rudimentary sketches evolved into masterpieces. In effect I kept my own journal, documenting my musings as well as my observations. I yearned to see what occurred when I stopped and observed the world, recounting details that frequently go unnoticed. It was this intense observation and self-inquiry that prompted me to craft my own version of a Romantic journal and thus emulate the Romantic mindset.

Outside, April 26

There is a chill in the air,
sweeping
alongside me, grazing
my lips and teasing
the skin upon my toes.

Like the false rush of excitement
it is there for an instant, puckering
one's skin, but gone the next,
provoking the mere illusion
of equilibrium.

Melodic notes,
more than a mere song
or tune, but a wistful yearning.
Every moment I am awakened
by such notes,
words whispered
through the anonymous
trees and bushes.

They are notes of melancholy.

The birds' songs continue to be sung, their throats
parched and their vocal chords weary.

They are singing a song,
the same song, a sad song.

Monotonous days,
notes in repetition that are never answered
but always sung.

Lines written sitting still, people milling around me, April 29

The air is brisk,
frigid when noticed. Cold ground,
burning an infant's tender toes when touched.

Life in the town,
a lady's laugh, a gentleman's
greeting, an infant's soulful bawl,
all slurred into one note that is forever
ignored.

Each step
a young lady takes upon the harsh asphalt echoes
her own note in the utmost softness
for the lady is not in a hurry with her timid stride.

Yet the gentleman donned
in a suit strides in a manner that is far
from that of elegance. Instead, his feet drum
a staccato on the ground,
the hands of his watch slide past
the time of his appointment.

An infant's steps are those of a lullaby, tentative steps
and moist skin in the midst of a lazy stroll.

Steps,
we live in a world of constant steps,
steps to the unknown and steps to death, but
steps in harmonious rhythm nonetheless.

One woman's steps are far quieter
than the rest; the soles of her slippers barely tapping
the ground, instead caressing it like
a gloved hand upon a cheek.

There lies a secret within this woman, in her
eager step and attempts at disclosure. So, too,
is there mystery in the misalignment
of her skirt's hem, slightly longer
on the left than on the right,
a burgundy stain
on her right shirt cuff.

A young man walks past,
a confident stride, but common
apparel. He glances at the woman and
she looks up, perhaps due to fate,
boredom, or dust in her eye.

A smile.

Perhaps there resides a secret
love affair, yearn for excitement on an
otherwise dreary morning, or timid
inklings of infatuation.

The man has a secret too, one
slightly more conspicuous, a scar
under his lower lip, a raised patch
of skin. A peach hue, new
but not quite fresh.
Scars, they consume even the best of us.

They consume the beggar
on the street, or in the alley

alongside the whiskey store and abandoned
floral shop. Scars overcome him, memories
and remnants of painful moments devouring
whatever defense he once held.

The world,
it resumes its stride in haste.

Portrait of a young woman, May 1

She walks with tentative strides,
her knees slightly inverted, casting
awkwardness on each step. Her
stature is petite, her figure thin, like a child
her body appears unsure
as to where to grow next. Her bones
slightly protrude
as one would observe by the thin
white lines above her hips, should her shirt be lifted.
White pigment bleeds
on her flesh. She has become an artist,
painting white shapes
on her pointed spine. She is an artist,
painting white bruises upon her raw flesh.

On her chest there lies a scar,
rough and raised, a half moon
traveling from the underside of her breast
to her belly button. It is from years past, but raw
as though it never healed.
Sometimes they never do.

Her lips,
dry with dead skin. Her lips
commonly lie still. Her smiles,
tight lipped, few and far between.
Lips, the bottom,
plump and full,
covered with the top,
thin and tight.

Sometimes she touches her face, runs
her finger down her cheek, coarse
callused skin against a smooth
morning blush. She pretends
that these are the hands

of someone else. She slides her fingers
against her lips, curious as to the sensation.
Moments of falsity and delusion.
Her cheeks display a pale blush,
natural from her life of naïveté
and uncertainty.

Her eyes are of the darkest hue, with
pupils lost
in two brown pools. She yearns for a lighter hue,
more contrast to her toned face, another color
to add to her personal palette. New eyes to be painted,
new eyes to observe the world
in a varied perspective. Yet sometimes
these colors run, tear stained cheeks
against pale skin. Her emotions
live to be concealed. Her thoughts
hidden, her tears veiled.
Each thought of hers is a secret, a whisper
of water on her tongue
created solely for her consumption.

I don't even know her,
and yet I attempt to paint her.

On a bench in the morning air, May 5

The picket fence stands, strewn with the teardrops of shadow,
A body's breath.

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The database, Gale Cengage Learning, provided me with manuscripts of the work of novelists and writers associated with the Romanticism and Victorian periods. Such writers included Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Lord Byron, and John Keats. This material had not been typed or formatted by modern critics, as it usually is, but instead scanned in as the original documents themselves. There was something intriguing about observing the work of these literary masters and being able to see the raw material of their own hands.

Upon speculation of these pieces it became increasingly difficult to discern what the artists were actually writing. Yet the aesthetic of the beautiful script and illegible scrawl overpowered the fact that it was predominately incomprehensible, adding an element of mystery to these manuscripts.

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In this autobiography, The Diaries of Paul Klee, the reader is introduced to artist Paul Klee's diary entries and snapshots into his life. Such accounts include a day's itinerary as well as

analysis of his dreams, ranging from pages of musings to concise recounts of his day. These entries range from the year 1898 to 1918 and are compiled in chronological order. The reader is introduced to the words of Paul Klee, and is granted access into remnants of his life and imagination.

Upon reading the words of Paul Klee, I was immediately struck by the beauty and poetic language he explored. As an artist Klee utilized his imagination in his paintings and it was incredibly intriguing to observe this use of imagination in his writings. This prompted me to inquire what the relationship between art and writing was, and the results of them working in tandem.

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The poem "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" by Romantic poet William Wordsworth describes his experience of revisiting the ruins of Tintern Abbey after five years. Within this piece Wordsworth is reveling at the beauty of the ruins and revisiting his nostalgia for a simpler time. Using this illustration of nature's allure, Wordsworth creates a comparison between man and nature, expressing his distaste for the industrialization that was progressively gaining power. With the delicate crafting of his words, the reader lives vicariously through Wordsworth, observing the sites that he had seen.

I was inspired by Wordsworth's words, and the intense observation that was present. Upon reading this poem I was forced to inquire as to what the relationship between man and nature was as well as the nostalgia Wordsworth explored in observing it. This prompted me to pay close attention to the world that surrounded me as well as the incorporation of detail in the words that I, myself, composed.