

Romanticism in wolfgang goethe's sorrows of young werther essay



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The author Goethe has been critically acclaimed for initiating romantic literature. It is essential to determine which elements of this work were responsible for these claims. There is no doubt that the controversy in his book was attributed towards this romantic element as no one had ventured into this area before.

Goethe writes his novel based on his personal experiences and those of another individual who lived during his lifetime. It is the fruitless reconciliation of the impulsive and sensitive to the society that makes Young Werther's journey so powerful. Generally speaking, this narrative was written in a confessional tone. Werther is highly personal even at a time when his society was immensely religious. What is even more interesting is that this general tone is what led to the development of romantic thought in the future.

Different parts of the novel keep mentioning attributes that can only be associated with the latter concept. For example, Werther exemplifies the importance of creative genius and frequently endorses impulsion as a necessary part of artistic work. His is a focus on instinct more than anything else. The very fact that romantic thought had yet to take effect in society could be the reason why Young Werther was always at odds with society.

He appears to be critical of society because his values were in direct contradiction to theirs. That stance explains why Werther always disliked society; he felt that it had intolerance for the unusual or even the great. This is what he says " I have come to realize in my own way that people have

always felt a need to decry the extraordinary men who accomplish great things that seemed impossible as intoxicated or insane.” (Goethe, 61)

It is also interesting to note how the author was daring enough to openly defy the principles of the prevalent era at that time i. e. enlightenment. Through the main character, the author argues that greatness through art can never be accomplished through the principles of objectivity and logic as argued in enlightenment thought. Instead, he believes that these thoughts need to come from the heart.

The finality with which the author ends his novel is also illustrative of romantic thought. Suicide was not a common occurrence in literature then (1774). Furthermore, to go ahead and support or defend suicide was simply out of the world. By offering a context for suicide, the author was in a way defying the prevailing times. There was a storm raging in Young Werther's heart and as he continued to be dissatisfied with life, this storm kept getting even more tumultuous.

As one reads the story of Werther, one starts identifying with his plight; he was never able to requite his love for the inaccessible and gorgeous Charlotte, he was never able to fit into his regular workplace and eventually became quite unhappy with the changes that his mother made concerning his childhood home. The audience can therefore identify with these struggles and it therefore makes it possible to understand why Werther made the final decision to commit suicide. It is indeed possible to see the hypocrisy and insincerity of his community. Therefore romantic thought made its mark

through the book because Goethe dared to embrace and explain what was initially presumed to be untouchable; suicide and the defense of it.

The story of Young Werther is one that is packed with emotions and personal sentiment. It is one of unfulfilled longings and illusive passions. For example, when Werther first gets to know Charlotte, he is immediately captivated by her beauty. When they get to know each other, they soon find out that they have the same preferences and interests. Werther's insights on life and nature are quite in tune with those of Charlotte. Therefore, one would presume that happiness and fulfillment are what lie ahead. However, after Charlotte's fiancé comes back, this happiness is soon turned to misery because he realizes that he can no longer be with her.

The excessive changes in mood that he goes through and perpetual unhappiness are a result of his love life. He now becomes critical about life because it always seems to hand him the short end of the stick. It may therefore be said that Werther's sentimentality is what made him so close to Charlotte. On the other hand, it eventually led to his conflict with the rest of society. Werther did not fit into the usual profile of what a man should be. In fact, at no point is this highly contrasted than when he interacts with Albert - Charlotte's wife. Werther himself comments that he holds Albert in such high esteem. Here, he believes that Albert is firmly in control of his temper so that makes him the exact opposite of Werther.

The protagonist goes ahead to say that " He has a great deal of feeling and is fully sensitive of the treasure he possesses in Lotte. He is free from ill humor which you know is the only fault I detest most." (Goethe, 34) Upon

realizing what a stark contrast he was to Albert, Werther started to loathe him. He was not content with the fact that he could not be able to communicate with her. This realization that Werther could never really be in the same category as the likes of Albert is what causes him so much sorrow.

The love of his life rejected him for being so different from what society expected. Werther was unable to take this rejection in his stride and instead opted to end his existence. The balance between passion and reason can be easily blurred and this is what happened to Werther. Charlotte and the protagonist's affair were indicative of the irrationality of Werther's actions. This was indeed a symptom of a romantic era where minimal emphasis was given to rational actions.

Goethe was therefore endorsing romanticism by featuring a protagonist who chose to make decisions on the basis of his emotions rather than reality. Werther knew from the start that Charlotte was already taken but he still went on to pursue her. He was destined for disaster but because he was caught up in these feelings, he still went on and developed them.

Romanticism often defies the logical and endorses the pursuance of the opposite in just the same way Werther did.

As stated earlier, this book endorses the issue of sentimentality very clearly through Werther. It is that endorsement that makes it one of the pioneer works of romantic literature. This can be witnessed when Werther gives his opinion about the inadequacy of words. He says "... words fail to convey the tenderness of his whole being; everything I could attempt to say would only

be clumsy..."(Goethe, 14). In this statement, Werther is illustrating his disdain for language.

He hates using simple and traditional phrases to express himself because none of that would be adequate enough to convey what he is really all about. He wanted language that is true to him and one that effectively communicates how he sees the world. Romanticism is built around the inadequacy of language and the failure of the enlightenment to fully express such sentiments is what has led to problems today.

Through the protagonist Young Werther, Goethe is able to defy the inadequacies of the enlightenment. He endorses the subjective, sentimental and irrational through this character. Goethe shows how society tends to be at odds with the unpredictable and new and this is why the book set precedent for other romantic literature around the world.

Goethe, Wolfgang. Sorrows of young Werther. Leipzig: Weygand'sche publishers, 1774.