

Acknowledgements

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Romantic suicide

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The concept of 'romantic suicide' emerged in the 1770s following the suicide of the teenage English poet Thomas Chatterton, memorialised in Goethe's 1774 novel in the character of young Werther. Eighteenth-century authors embellished these men as romantic outcasts, triumphing over death through fearless individualism to achieve immortality in heaven. Such myths still persist today, exemplified in journalists' responses to the suicides of artists such as Kitaj, Kirchner, Rothko and Van Gogh. Glorifying their deaths by wreathing them in martyrdom is a dangerous practice. Awareness of the damage wreaked by propagation of these myths is the starting point for challenging them.

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