**Topic Page:** Romanticism

**Definition:** Romanticism from The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences

A cultural and artistic movement in Europe and America between 1770 and 1860. It is generally seen as a reaction against Enlightenment values and industrialism. It is characterized by a privileging of individualism, passion, imagination, social transformation, and nature. While Romanticism is typically associated with literature (Wordsworth and Keats in England, Goethe and Hölderlin in Germany, and Emerson and Whitman in America), music (Beethoven and Chopin) and painting (Turner and Goya) were also significantly influenced.

**Summary Article: Romanticism**

From The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide

In literature and the visual arts, a style that emphasizes the imagination, emotions, and creativity of the individual artist. Romanticism also refers specifically to late-18th- and early-19th-century European culture, as contrasted with 18th-century classicism. See also English literature.

Inspired by the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau and by contemporary social change and revolution (American and French), Romanticism emerged as a reaction to 18th-century values, asserting emotion and intuition over rationalism, the importance of the individual over social conformity, and the exploration of natural and psychic wildernesses over classical restraint. Major themes of Romantic art and literature include a love of atmospheric landscapes (see sublime); nostalgia for the past, particularly the Gothic; a love of the primitive, including folk traditions; cult of the individual hero figure, often an artist or political revolutionary; romantic passion; mysticism; and a fascination with death.

In literature, Romanticism is represented by Novalis, Clemens Brentano, Joseph Eichendorff, and Johann Tieck in Germany, who built on the work of the Sturm und Drang movement; William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron, and Walter Scott in Britain; and Victor Hugo, Alfonse de Lamartine, George Sand, and Alexandre Dumas père in France. The work of the US writers Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Walt Whitman reflects the influence of Romanticism.

In art, Caspar David Friedrich in Germany and J M W Turner in England are outstanding landscape painters of the Romantic tradition, while Henry Fuseli and William Blake represent a mystical and fantastic trend. The French painter Eugène Delacroix is often cited as the embodiment of the true Romantic artist.

Romanticism in literature began to emerge in the Augustan period, as early as 1726 (when James Thomson began ‘The Seasons’, 1726–30).

**Influences** The movement, in both literature and art, was a reaction against classical constraints of style and theme. As the 18th century progressed, classicism seemed less and less satisfactory as an expression of the increasing dilemmas faced by society. The Industrial Revolution was beginning to transform the traditional ways of life, particularly in the country, and poverty and exploitation were rife.

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/romanticism
in towns and cities. There was also a reaction against universal religious belief, possibly as a result of scientific experimentation. In this context, Romanticism replaced tightly controlled classical certainties with images of ideal, and often dangerous, natural beauty and grandeur. The chaos of nature became an analogy for human emotions and experiences. The key issues were that emotion and intuition, rather than logic, ruled man, and that the individual was more important than the society he or she lived in.

**Poetry** In practice, this rejection of industrialization and new interest in the individual within nature led to a wide range of responses, from the restraint of English poet William Wordsworth, the extensive use of drugs by English writers Thomas De Quincey and Lord Byron, to the intellectual and spiritual vision of English poet and artist William Blake. Wordsworth's 'The Prelude' (published in 1850, after his death) sharply contrasts his childhood in the unspoiled countryside with the changes since, and portrays nature as a godlike force. The work of English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge frequently takes as its theme the healing power of natural beauty. On the whole, literary romantics found poetry the most powerful medium, and the most influential works of the Romantic movement can be seen to be the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), a collaboration between the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge. The theme of death is also a major one, either in imagination or reality. English poet John Keats’s ‘Ode to Autumn’ (1819), written two years before his own early death, confronts this issue in a positive way. More common is the concept of death as a terrifying figure to those who cling to the pleasures of the material world.

The extremes of a literature suddenly freed from 18th-century restrictions are well demonstrated by the open defiance of Christian belief and morality. English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote of God as the ‘enemy’, and not the preserver, of mankind in his long poem ‘Prometheus Unbound’ (1820). Byron is often credited with developing the ‘anti-hero’ (an immoral and destructive character who is nonetheless attractive to the reader) in his long poem ‘Don Juan’ (1819–24). Another type of anti-hero is the individual who asserts his own desires without regard for the good of society. Such a character is found in Coleridge’s ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ (1797–8), in which, after bringing a curse upon himself and his fellow sailors by killing an albatross without any reason, he ends the poem wandering the earth.

**Prose** The rejection of modern society led to a fashion for historical, and particularly medieval, stories. Good examples are *Ivanhoe* (1819) and other works by Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott. The influence of the medieval continued throughout the 19th century, particularly among the artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The continuing passion among readers for the gothic novel combined many romantic elements, including wild and dreadful landscapes, with men dwarfed by them. Novels such as *Frankenstein* (1818), by English writer Mary Shelley, demonstrates increasing suspicion of scientific experimentation as opposed to the ‘natural’ way of life.

**documents**

Blake, William: ‘Jerusalem’

Blake, William: From ‘Auguries of Innocence’

Blake, William: ‘The Lamb’

Blake, William: ‘A Divine Image’

Blake, William: ‘Infant Sorrow’

Blake, William: ‘A Poison Tree’

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/romanticism
Blake, William: ‘London’
Blake, William: ‘The Sick Rose’
Blake, William: ‘The Clod and the Pebble’
Hazlitt, William: On Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: From ‘Ode to the West Wind’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: ‘Ozymandias’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: ‘England in 1819’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: From ‘To a Skylark’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: From ‘Mont Blanc: Lines written in the Vale of Chamouni’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: ‘To Night’
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: From Alastor
Shelley, Percy Bysshe: Extract from A Defence of Poetry
Thomas, Dylan: On William Wordsworth
Wordsworth, William: From the Preface to Lyrical Ballads

weblinks
Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net

images
Byron
Delacroix, (Ferdinand Victor) Eugène Constantinople Captured by Crusaders
Martin, John Sadak in Search of the Waters of Oblivion
Turner, Joseph Mallord William Mountainous Landscape
Turner, Joseph Mallord William The Shipwreck

audios
Scott, Sir Walter Ivanhoe

APA
Chicago
Harvard
MLA
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA