


1800 - 1860

AMERICAN ROMANTICISM




Prose Authors of the time period

- Washington Irving
 - James Fenimore Cooper
 - Edgar Allan Poe
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson
 - Henry David Thoreau
 - Herman Melville
 - Nathaniel Hawthorne
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Poets of the time period

- William Cullen Bryant
 - John Greenleaf Whittier
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes
 - Edgar Allan Poe
 - James Russell Lowell
 - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
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Journey

- The long-distance journey is part of our history, both real and fictional...
- The New York Times






American Romanticism

- Best described as a journey away from the corruption of civilization and the limits of rational thought and toward the integrity of nature and the freedom of the imagination.
 - Romanticism – value feeling and intuition over reason. (started in Germany – late 18th century)
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Characteristics of American Romanticism

- Value feeling and intuition over reason
 - Places faith in inner experience and the power of the imagination
 - Shuns the artificiality of civilization and seeks unspoiled nature
 - Prefers youthful innocence to educated sophistication
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Characteristics continued

- Champions individual freedom and the worth of the individual
 - Contemplates nature's beauty as a path to spiritual and moral development
 - Looks backward to the wisdom of the past and distrusts progress
 - Finds beauty and truth in exotic locales, the supernatural realm and the inner world of the imagination
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Characteristics continued

- Sees poetry as the highest expression of the imagination
 - Finds inspiration in myth, legend, and folk culture
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Romantic Escapism

- Wanted to rise above boring realities. Looked for ways to accomplish this:
 - Exotic setting in the more “natural” past or removed from the grimy and noisy industrial age. (Supernatural, legends, folklore)
 - Gothic Novels – haunted landscapes, supernatural events, medieval castles
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Romantic Escapism

- Tried to contemplate the natural world until dull reality disappeared and revealed beauty and truth.
 - Evident in lyric poetry
 - Commonplace object or event brings the speaker to an important, deeply felt insight
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Puritans vs. Romantics

- Moral lessons from nature.
- Lessons defined by religion
- Nature revealed the God they knew
- Found less clearly defined divinity in nature
- Contemplating nature led to a general emotional and intellectual awakening

American Novel


- The development of the American novel is directly related to westward expansion, nationalistic pride, and city growth
- All of the above confirmed the “ideal frontier life”
- “Geography of the imagination” – town, country, frontier would play an integral role

James Fenimore Cooper

- *Precaution* – life in an English vicarage
- *The Spy* – set during the American Revolution and influenced by Sir Walter Scott
- *The Pioneers* – Uniquely about frontier life
- First American Heroic figure: Natty Bumppo, Hawkeye, Deerslayer, Leatherstocking




American Romantic Hero

- Is young or possesses youthful qualities
 - Is innocent and pure of purpose
 - Has a sense of honor based not on society's rules but on some higher principle
 - Loves nature and avoids town life
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American Romantic Hero *cont.*

- Has a knowledge of people and of life based on deep, intuitive understanding, not on formal learning
 - Quests for some higher truth in the natural world
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Romantic Poetry

- Worked within European literary traditions rather than by crafting a different or unique voice
 - Used English themes, meter, and imagery.
 - They appear to look backward over their shoulders at what has been done before
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Fireside Poets

- A Boston group of poets
 - Most notably known as such since their poems were read aloud at the fireside as entertainment
 - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
 - John Greenleaf Whittier
 - Oliver Wendell Holmes
 - James Russell Lowell
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Fireside Poetry Subjects

- Love
- Patriotism
- Nature
- Family
- God
- Religion
- American folk themes
- American landscape
- Abolitionist issues
- American Indian culture
- Celebrations of the American people




Transcendentalists - Idealists

- The word refers to the idea that in determining the ultimate reality of God, the universe, the self, and other important matters, one must transcend, or go beyond, everyday human experience in the physical world.
- Intuition is an important tool for discovering truth.





Transcendentalist's View of the World

- Everything (even humans) is a reflection of the Divine Soul
 - The physical facts of the natural world are a doorway to the spiritual or ideal world.
 - People can use their intuition to behold God's spirit revealed in nature or in their own souls
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Transcendentalist Views *cont.*

- Self-reliance and individualism must outweigh external authority and blind conformity to custom and tradition.
- Spontaneous feelings and intuition are superior to deliberate intellectualism and rationality.

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- “Every natural fact,” Emerson wrote, “is a symbol of some spiritual fact.”
 - Nature was the doorway to the mystical world holding important truths.



Dark Romantics


- Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe
 - Labeled anti-transcendentalists because their view of the world seems so profoundly opposed to the optimistic view of Emerson and his followers.
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Transcendentalists vs. Dark Romantics

- Both...
 - Valued intuition over logic and reason
 - Valued signs and symbols in human events
- DR's disagreed with the premise that those facts are necessarily good or harmless
- DR's redressed the balance




Dark Romantics

- Explore the conflict between good and evil.
 - The psychological effects of guilt and sin
 - Madness and derangement of the human psyche
 - Counterpoint to the optimism of the Transcendentalists.
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Hawthorne and Melville

- The two who became friends discovered a common bond: They both saw a dark side to human existence, and they sought to record this aspect of human nature in their works.



A Coming of Age
1840 - 1860

THE AMERICAN RENAISSANCE

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- In the mid-nineteenth century, writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville produced some of the early masterpieces of American Literature.
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New England Home of Reform

- Horace Mann – improving public education
 - Dorothea Dix – living conditions in institutions for the mentally ill
 - William Lloyd Garrison – Abolitionist
 - Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller and Emma Willard – Women's rights
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