

# Introduction to romanticism



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Introduction to Romanticism Romanticism has very little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic," although love may occasionally be the subject of Romantic art. Rather, it is an international artistic and philosophical movement that redefined the fundamental ways in which people in Western cultures thought about themselves and about their world.

Imagination The imagination was elevated to a position as the supreme faculty of the mind. This contrasted distinctly with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. The Romantics tended to define and to present the imagination as our ultimate "shaping" or creative power, the approximate human equivalent of the creative powers of nature or even deity. It is dynamic, an active, rather than passive power, with many functions. Imagination is the primary faculty for creating all art. On a broader scale, it is also the faculty that helps humans to constitute reality, for (as Wordsworth suggested), we not only perceive the world around us, but also in part create it. Uniting both reason and feeling (Coleridge described it with the paradoxical phrase, "intellectual intuition"), imagination is extolled as the ultimate synthesizing faculty, enabling humans to reconcile differences and opposites in the world of appearance. The reconciliation of opposites is a central ideal for the Romantics. Finally, imagination is inextricably bound up with the other two major concepts, for it is presumed to be the faculty which enables us to "read" nature as a system of symbols. The Romantics believed in following one's heart or gut to lead to life's truths, particularly in using Nature as the catalyst. For example, Melville's *Moby Dick* is an escape novel; Ishmael escapes from the confining environment of Manhattan to go to the sea aboard a whaling ship. To them, things like intuition, nature, supernatural, and were important. According to the web site us info,

Romanticism concerns " the fictional exploration into the hidden recesses of the soul" (usinfo). Most of these characters were loners, like Melville's Ishmael or Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown. According to vcu, " In literature it was America's first great creative period" (vcu). Romantics strongly believe in the power of human goodness. In contrast, the Realists had too much of Romanticism. They stressed the need to belong to the " real world." Events that occur in these stories will be plausible, unlike being visited by those from beyond the grave. The Realists portrayed subjects previously unportrayed in literature, such as slums of larger cities, the grim realities of life, the new urban poor or portraying any location realistically known as local color. They felt the need to look at the world as it currently existed and without all the sentimentality of the Romantics. Realism may have never existed without Romanticism directly before it. Of course, Romanticism may have never existed without The Age of Reason before it. All these movements are absolutely essential for understanding the progression of not just American literature but American life in general. These were movements of literature but also movements of thought and art and everything else that was going on this country. The literary products of the period reflected the priorities and values of the time, focusing mainly on political and economic themes. Philosophical writings similarly reflected the mechanistic preoccupations of the age and dealt more so than ever with the individual human experience as well as personal thoughts. Romanticism, then, emerged as a reaction against what was perceived to be a cultural climate that had been lacking in spontaneity, creativity, and individuality. Indeed, some of the earliest and most profound writings of the Romantic period were not the poems themselves, but manifestos and discourses on <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-to-romanticism/>

the nature of human beings and creative expression, such as Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*, and Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. In these three exemplary prose pieces, the Romantic poets promote their vision of what poetry, and by extension, society, should be. Their vision was quite distinct from that of the Enlightenment, and in these pieces, the major characteristics of Romanticism were developed and disseminated. One of these characteristics, as articulated by Wordsworth in the *Preface* was the belief that "ordinary things [were worth writing about] and should be presented to the mind in an unusual way".<sup>7</sup> The Romantics believed that through close attention, the most ordinary, quotidian objects, emotions, and experiences could be elevated to the extraordinary. The European Romantic movement reached America in the early 19th century. American Romanticism was just as multifaceted and individualistic as it was in Europe. Like the Europeans, the American Romantics demonstrated a high level of moral enthusiasm, commitment to individualism and the unfolding of the self, an emphasis on intuitive perception, and the assumption that the natural world was inherently good, while human society was filled with corruption. Romanticism was a movement that was at its peak in the second half of the eighteenth century. It went against all logical and rational approaches and ventured into worlds unknown, that were perfect, surreal, and beautiful. There was hardly any room for imperfection, and these characteristics became a part of the romantic movement only in response to the changing nature of the world (such as the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution). This genre focused on the search for truths that do not exist, to which there are no natural answers. Some more characteristics of romanticism are as follows:

Romanticism deals with a very idealistic view of life. Everything is perfect in a romantic world. All characters in romantic literature are usually extreme; the hero has all positive qualities, while the villain has all negative qualities. Romantic art and literature deals with a metaphorical approach to its work. Nothing is obvious but is vague and one has to delve within its depths to understand its true meaning. Highlighting the beauty in everything and focusing on the little things that make up life are certain aspects of romanticism that make it stand out so vividly. Every romantic work, no matter how thrilling, mysterious, or turbulent, has a happy ending. These characteristics were also evident in various forms of romantic art. Some classic literary romantic works include *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville. The works of famous poets such as William Blake and William Wordsworth are also important contributions to the romantic movement.

Realism Realism was a literary movement directly opposed to the previous movement of Romanticism. Realism followed the Romantic Movement and was at its peak in the latter half of the eighteenth and early years of the nineteenth century. As the name suggests, realism dealt with reality; it presented the real truth of life without adding any color to it. Realism was a direct response to the Romantic Movement and was exactly the opposite of all that the movement stood for. Some more characteristics of this genre are as follows: Realism picks up situations from real life to form its basis in any area, be it art or literature. No events that occurred in this kind of work were out of the ordinary, and the language used was simple, not glorified. The concept of the work is obvious, and not metaphorical. Everything is evident by its very nature. Realism highlights the reality of life and does not use any embellishments to cover up what might

be perceived as ugly or gory. Realistic literary work may not always have a happy ending. A very popular literary work that is indicative of the true nature of realism is a play called *The Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, a Norwegian playwright. *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert was also another great work that clearly presented the many characteristics of realism. Though the focus here has been on literary and artistic movements in these fields, in effect, these movements affected all areas of life including politics and science. Each has their own approach and it is only for you to decide which approach pleases your senses better. Both genres have strong grounds in their own right and one cannot be touted as better than the other. These genres are merely indicative of different situations that brought about changes in thought processes, which in turn transformed the perception of the world by man. In general, the work of these writers illustrates the main tenet of realism, that writers must not select facts in accord with preconceived aesthetic or ethical ideals but must set down their observations impartially and objectively. Concerned with the faithful representation of life, which frequently lacks form, the realists tended to downplay plot in favor of character and to concentrate on middle-class life and preoccupations, avoiding larger, more dramatic issues.