American Romanticism

Romanticism does not necessarily deal with the theme of love.

American Romanticism

1800 - 1860

Civil War - 1865
Introduction

- The theme of **journey** as a declaration of independence
- Bryant, Homes, Whittier, Longfellow, and Lowell are Romantic poets
  - *Rip Van Winkle*
- Irving is the Father of American Literature
  - *The Last of the Mohicans*
- Cooper is the Father of the American novel
- Poe is the inventor of the American Short Story
Introduction

Emerson is the Father of American Transcendentalism
Thoreau is a famous practical transcendentalist
Melville and Hawthorne are Anti-Romantics
Dickinson and Whitman are bridge poets between American Romanticism and the 20th century

transcendentalism = becoming one with nature and glorifying God through the simplistic life.
Introduction

The rationalistic view of urban life was replaced by the Romantic view (Realism).

Rationalists saw cities as a place to find success and self-realization.

Romantics saw the city as a place of moral corruption, poverty, and death.
Introduction

- The Romantic journey is to the countryside or independence (nature)
- The Romantics associated the country with independence, moral clarity, and purity
- The Gothic Romantic, E.A. Poe, saw the country as a place of phantasm
- Irving saw the country as idyllic and as an escape
The Romantic Sensibility

Romanticism: valuing feeling and intuition over reason

Romanticism: viewing life as we would like it to be, rather than how it really is

Romanticism began in Germany and influenced literature, music, and art

Romanticism is a reaction against Rationalism
The Romantic Sensibility

The development of slums and poverty due to the Industrial Revolution turned people from Rationalism. Romantics believed that imagination, emotion, spontaneity, feelings, and nature were more important than rational thought.
Characteristics of Romanticism

- values feelings over intuition
- values the power of the imagination
- seeks the beauty of unspoiled nature
- values youthful innocence
- values individual freedom
- values the lessons of the past
- finds beauty in exotic locales, the supernatural, and in the imagination
- values poetry as the highest expression of the imagination
- values myth, legend, and folk culture
Romantic Escapism

Romantic writing looked for comforting or exotic settings from the past. This was found in the supernatural, in nature, and/or in folk legends. Romantics believed in contemplating, or becoming one with the natural world. The Gothic novel emerged from Romanticism.
Romantic Escapism

- The Gothic novel had wild, haunted landscapes.
- It had supernatural events in the plot.
- It was often mysterious.
- The Gothic concept had roots in France, Germany, and England.
- Edgar Allan Poe was Romanticism’s great American writer.

The Fall of the House of Usher
Romantic Escapism

- Romanticism also used **lyrical poetry** as a means to contemplate the beauty of nature.
- It focused on **simple natural beauties**.
- Its intent was to seek truth through a calm contemplation of a simple natural beauty.
- Romantics saw **God** in this contemplation.
Most American Romantic writers imitated the European writing style.

American Romantic novelists broke away from the European tradition and discovered uniquely American topics and settings (re: the Civil War).

American novelists explored the vast unknown lands – something the Europeans could not do.
The American Novel

James Fenimore Cooper was the first American novelist to break from European tradition.

His novels were set in the American frontier.

His central character, Natty Bumppo, was the first American literary hero.

The Last of Mohicans
The New American Hero

American Romantic literature created this unique person

- youthful
- innocent
- intuitive
- one with nature
- a loner – uneasy around women
- handsome
- brave
- moral and honorable
American Romantic Poetry

Most Romantic poets worked within conventional European literary structures.

They proved that American poetry could reflect American subject matter, yet still hold to conventional poetic style.

Most American Romantic poets wrote about the past.
American Romantic Poetry

The Fireside Poets, a Boston group of Longfellow, Whittier, Holmes, and Lowell, were widely read and loved in America. They were the TV of the American Romantic period and families gathered around the fireside to be entertained by their poetry. Their subject matter was comfortable and instructional.
Deism

• Rationalism applied to theology produced **Deism**.
• Most of the Founding Fathers considered themselves Deists.
• They **Refuted Puritan notions of Divine miracles, manifestations, and interventions.**
• In general, Deists were **more concerned with the practical rather than the spiritual world.**
• **Degrees of Deism ranged widely.**
Key Facts about the Period

Central tenets of Deism

- God created the universe and then disassociated himself from it. He “wound it up” and then stepped back. In Deism, God might be compared to an absentee landlord.
- God cannot be accessed through organized religion, rituals, or sacraments.
- God was more evident in the mechanism of nature than in scriptural revelation.
- Most Deists believed Jesus a great philosopher, teacher, and leader, but not the son of God. God did not select a “chosen people”—not even the Puritans.
Key Facts about the Declaration of Independence

Dual audience
• Jefferson and his committee recognized that the formation of the United States was a momentous occasion in history.
• They were writing not just for present but future audiences.

“Man thinking”
• They exemplified what Emerson termed “man thinking.” That is, they were individuals engaged in all dimensions of life. They combined the life of the mind, the life of the body, and the life of the soul, and they acted from principle.
• They grappled with present and future implications.
• They were devoted to theoretical and philosophical contemplations and practical and pragmatic issues.