

The Romantic Period

The Romantic Period (c. 1790–1850)

Key Themes, Historical Context, Major Figures, and Lasting Impact

1. Historical & Cultural Background

Aspect	Details
Timeframe	Roughly 1790–1850 (late 18th cent–mid 19th cent).
Geographic focus	Europe (especially Britain, Germany, France, Russia) and the United States.
Political climate	After-effects of the French Revolution, Napoleonic Wars, rise of nationalism, early industrialization.
Social changes	Urbanization, emergence of a middle-class readership, expansion of public concerts, galleries, and literary societies.
Philosophical influences	Immanuel Kant's ideas of subjectivity, Johann Gottfried Herder's "Volksgeist," and the early German Idealism of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.
Reaction to	The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, order, and universal laws; the Neoclassical focus on restraint and form.

2. Core Aesthetic Principles

Principle	Explanation	Typical Manifestations
Emotion over Reason	Prioritizes feeling, intuition, and the sublime.	Passionate language, dramatic contrasts, intense personal voice.
Individualism & Subjectivity	The poet/artist as a unique, visionary figure.	First-person narratives, confessional tone, autobiographical elements.
Nature as Spiritual & Sublime	Nature is a source of awe, moral insight, and a mirror of the inner self.	Picturesque landscapes, stormy seas, wild mountains, pastoral idylls.
Imagination & the Supernatural	Emphasis on the creative mind and the mysterious.	Ghosts, myths, folklore, exotic locales, dream-like visions.
Interest in the Past	Medieval, folk, and exotic histories become sources of inspiration.	Gothic architecture, chivalric romance, ancient myths.

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Nationalism & Folk Culture	Celebration of native language, legends, and customs.	Use of folk songs, dialects, national epics (e.g., <i>Nibelungen</i>).
Rebellion & Freedom	Valorization of personal and political liberty.	Themes of revolution, the heroic outlaw, the "outsider."

3. Major Literary Genres & Forms

Genre	Romantic Features	Representative Works
Lyric Poetry	Intimate, first-person, musical rhythm; focus on nature & emotion.	Wordsworth – " <i>Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey</i> "; Keats – " <i>Ode to a Nightingale</i> ."
Ballad & Folk Narrative	Simple language, refrains, oral tradition feel; often tragic.	Coleridge – " <i>The Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> ." ; Byron – " <i>The Prisoner of Chillon</i> ."
Gothic Novel	Haunted settings, mystery, psychological terror.	Mary Shelley – <i>Frankenstein</i> ; Ann Radcliffe – <i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i> .
Historical Novel	Blend of fact & fiction, heroic past, national identity.	Sir Walter Scott – <i>Ivanhoe</i> ; Alexandre Dumas – <i>The Three Musketeers</i> .
Romantic Drama	Emphasis on inner conflict, larger-than-life protagonists.	Friedrich Schiller – <i>William Tell</i> ; Victor Hugo – <i>Hernani</i> .