

American Literature Movements Summarized

Puritan – (1472-1750) – Most of this is histories, journals, personal poems, sermons, and diaries. We call it *Puritan* because the majority of the writers during this period were strongly influenced by Puritan ideals and values. Jonathan Edwards continues to be recognized from this period.

- Roger Williams
- Anne Bradstreet
- Edward Taylor
- Jonathan Edwards
- Michael Wigglesworth

Enlightenment – (1750-1800) – Called the *Enlightenment* period due to the influence of science and logic. Also known as the AGE of REASON. In British Lit, this is called Neoclassical. This period is marked in US literature by political writings. Genres included political documents, speeches, and letters. Benjamin Franklin is typical of this period. There is a lack of emphasis and dependence on the Bible and more use of common sense (logic) and science. There was not a divorce from the Bible but an adding to or expanding of the truths found there.

- Benjamin Franklin
- Thomas Paine
- Thomas Jefferson
- Phillis Wheatley
- John & Abigail Adams
- Philip Freneau

Romanticism – (1800-1840/1865 depending on who you ask) - *Romanticism* was a literary and artistic movement of the nineteenth century that placed a premium on fancy, imagination, emotion, nature, individuality, and exotica. There's a movement here from personal and political documents to entertaining ones. Purely American topics were introduced such as frontier life. Romantic elements can be found in the works of American writers as diverse as:

- James Fenimore Cooper
- Edgar Allan Poe
- Henry David Thoreau
- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Emily Dickinson
- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Herman Melville

Romanticism is particularly evident in the works of the New England Transcendentalists.

Transcendentalism – (1840-1855) - *Transcendentalism* (a branch of Romanticism) was an American literary and philosophical movement of the nineteenth century. The Transcendentalists, who were based in New England, believed that intuition and the individual conscience “transcend” experience and thus are better guides to truth than are the senses and logical reason. The Transcendentalists respected the individual spirit and the natural world, believing that divinity was present everywhere, in nature and in each person.

The Transcendentalists included:

- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Henry David Thoreau
- Bronson Alcott
- Walt Whitman

The anti-Transcendentalists rebelled against the philosophy that man is basically good:

- Nathaniel Hawthorne
- Herman Melville

Realism – (1865-1915) - *Realism* is the presentation in art of the details of actual life. Realist writers *reacted against Romanticism, rejecting heroic, adventurous, unusual, or unfamiliar subjects*. They stressed the actual as opposed to the imagined or the fanciful. The Realists tried to write truthfully and objectively about ordinary characters in ordinary situations. American realism grew from the work of local-color writers such as **Bret Harte** and **Sarah Orne Jewett** and is evident in the writings of major figures such as **Mark Twain** and **Henry James**.

Two outgrowths of Realism, we will see: (1) **Naturalism** and (2) **Regionalism**

Introduction to Romanticism – Main Features

Romanticism has very little to do with things popularly thought of as "romantic" relationships.

1 – Individualism instead of Reliance on Higher Authority of God

Man as an Individual is superior. Man is perceived as an individualistic hero, or man is considered the sole arbiter of truth where each individual determines his/her own truth and perspective on reality. Man is “freed” from understanding truth through God’s Word.

2 – Imagination & Feelings over Reason & Rational Thought

Previously, during the Age of Reason in 1600 & 1700's, **Reason** was considered the most important human faculty in the creative process. But now - **Feeling** was considered superior to rationality as a mode of perceiving and experiencing reality

Main Thing to Remember here: The Romantic's emphasis on the imagination was accompanied by greater emphasis on the importance of intuition, instincts, and FEELINGS.

3 – Nature as the Path to Understanding Truth

Romantics believed that God revealed himself only through nature. Man can understand divine truth and divine ways by communing with the universal spirit through Nature.

To the Romantics, evil originated with the corrupting influences of society and Nature was considered untouched by the pollution of society's evil.

"The Cult of the Noble Savage" = Primitivism

The term "noble savage" is the idea that:

- Without civilization, humans are essentially good
- It is civilization that makes them act in bad ways.

It is firmly rooted in the idea that man is born basically good and it is society or civilization that corrupts

Therefore, to the Romantics, indigenous peoples (Indians/Native Americans)

- have been uncorrupted by the trappings of progress and are unpolluted by society
- are living in greater purity, closer to their basic state of "original goodness" (!)

Romantic Primitivism attributes the following traits to indigenous people:

- Living in harmony with Nature
- Generosity and selflessness
- Innocence
- Inability to lie, fidelity
- Physical health
- Disdain of luxury
- Moral courage
- "Natural" intelligence or innate, untutored wisdom

4 – “The Distant”

This refers to the use of distant settings, both in space and time.

Four Literary Groups of the Romantic Period Writers

Minor Romantics

1-Knickerbockers

Writers of the period centered in *New York City*

2-New England School

Writers of the period who were centered in *Boston*

Major Romantics

3-Transcendental Optimists

Followed the tenets of Transcendentalism

4-Transcendental Pessimists

Reacted against the tenets of Transcendentalism

Religious Thought during the Romantic Period

Unitarianism

The denominational name for **Deism**, Unitarianism was a denomination that grew rapidly during the Romantic Age.

Unitarians believed in:

1. Fatherhood of God
2. Brotherhood of Man
3. Leadership of Jesus
4. Salvation by the evolution of Character (not by Jesus' death on the cross)
5. Man will inevitably progress/evolve to greatness

Unitarians:

1. Did NOT believe Bible is inspired Word of God
2. They denied facts of Salvation or Damnation
3. They saw sin as a problem of morality and not an offense against God
4. Saw Jesus as a great teacher rather than as the divine Son of God
5. Did not believe in the Trinity

Darwinism

Charles Darwin wrote in 1859

- *On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*

Started the path toward evolutionary thought dominating all disciplines of study

It's the idea that we all evolved from apes

Darwinists believed that there is a hierarchy of "races"! This is an extremely racist concept!!!!!!

Apes

Australoid - Aborigines of Australia

Negroid – Blacks

Mongoloid - Indians and Chinese

Caucasian - Whites