

## Overview: American Romanticism (1770-1860) and Transcendentalism (1820-1860)

### History of the Romantic Movement

- Germany – Goethe (Sorrrows of Young Werther)
- England – Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, and Keats
- U.S. – Irving and Emerson

*Other notes:*

The Romantic period also overlaps historically with Victorian Literature  
Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller – designated as Transcendentalists  
Poe, Dickinson, Melville, Hawthorne – designated as Romanticists (often critiqued the Emersonian ideal)

Romanticism:

- >Revolt against the “Age of Reason”
- >Appreciation of the beauty of nature
- >Exaltation of emotion over reason
- >Examination of identity, a turning to self & individualism over conformity
- >Preoccupation with the hero, the solitary genius (often the common man)
- >Emphasis on imagination as gateway to the transcendent
- >Early writers employing romance mode: James Fenimore Cooper and Washington Irving

### Comparison between Age of Enlightenment/Reason and Romantic Period

*Period of Enlightenment and Revolutionary War – Age of Reason (1700-1770)*

\*\*Benjamin Franklin’s The Autobiography

*The American Romantic Period (1770-1860)*

\*American Romanticists: James F. Cooper, Melville, Poe, Dickinson, Whitman, Frederick Douglass, Hawthorne

\*Versions of American Romanticism – Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Thoreau – identified themselves as part of a movement known as Transcendentalism (Dickinson, Hawthorne, and Whitman – though not transcendentalists per se – were profoundly affected by the movement)

*Non-Romantic/Classical Characteristics*

*Romantic Characteristics*

Reason  
Public Self  
Conservative  
Loves Public, Urban Life  
External Reality  
Objectivity  
Repressed Desire  
Mechanical  
Form & Control  
Materialist/Empirical

Emotion  
Individualistic/PrivateSelf  
Revolutionary  
Loves Solitude/Nature  
Fantasy/Introspection  
Subjectivity  
Satisfaction of Desire  
Organic  
Creativity & Spontaneity  
Idealist Philosophy

### **Transcendentalism:**

A movement of writers and philosophers that believed in the essential unity of all creation (versus the Calvinistic view that perceived the material world as innately depraved and fallen), the innate goodness of humanity, and the supremacy of insight over logic for the realization of the deepest truths.

### **Basic Tenets of Transcendentalism:**

- The spark of divinity lies within man
- Everything is a microcosm of existence
- The individual soul is identical to the OverSoul
- By meditation, communing with nature, through work and art, man can attain a true sense of beauty and goodness and truth