

Romanticism

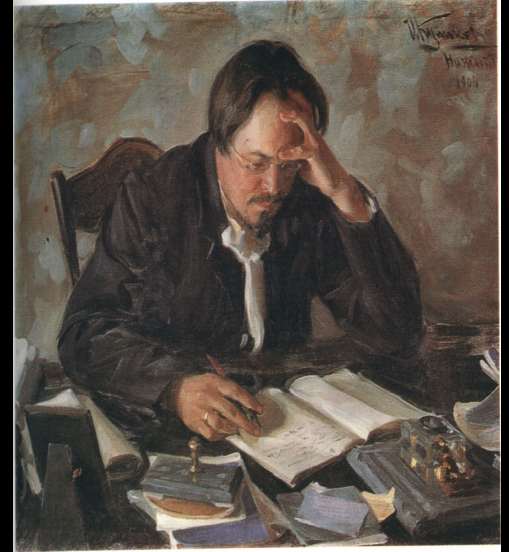


The decline of rationalism

At its most extreme, rationalism grew into an **elitist** following - The rationalists looked down upon people with little education who refused to “better themselves”

Things that were not provable by science were believed by rationalists to not matter, or not exist. This included things like **religion** and **emotions**.

This caused a **divide** - The rationalists were seen as **egotistical** by the everyday American.



Historical Context

Industrial Revolution: Independence from Great Britain and the Age of Enlightenment's emphasis on science technology caused an economic boom - this led to the Industrial Revolution. Skyscrapers, cities, and automobiles became commonplace.

Westward Expansion: In 1803, the U.S. sealed the Louisiana Purchase, buying all the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains.

California Gold Rush: The discovery of Gold in uncharted California pushed hundreds of thousands of Americans westward.

Rise of Romanticism



Amongst the chaos of the Industrial Revolution and the hope of Westward Expansion, a new **movement** emerged: Romanticism!

Romanticism first began as a **reaction** against the alienating Rationalist philosophies. They thought that by putting so much emphasis on logic and science, the Rationalists were missing out on **emotional** truths.

In other words, not just highly educated scientists and politicians have important things to say - the **artists** and the **poets** do, too!

Romantic Poetry

Romantics thought **poetry** was the highest embodiment of imaginations, the most creative thing one could do.

Romantics often **contrasted** poetry with science. They saw science as stripping things of their emotional truths.

Romantic Edgar Allen Poe once called science a “vulture” with wings of “dull realities” which preyed upon the **hearts** of poets.

Romantic Escapism

Escapism - Romantic thinkers wanted to escape!

They wanted to flee the dull realities of science and logic that had **dominated** the way of thinking for so long.

They also wanted to escape the cities, which they saw as places filled with disease, corruption, shifting morals, and death, and escape to the “**Wild West**,” which was open, free, and full of possibilities.

This positive way of thinking is reflected in “**Westward Expansion**”



American Romanticism

The Romantic period started in **Europe**, but it was the first period in which American writers and artists truly developed their own **style**.

American Romantics had a sense of limitless frontier that inspired them in different ways than the European writers.

Europeans saw Americans as **uncivilized** and uneducated, but Americans played this stereotype to their advantage.

Rationalist Hero

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Romantic Hero

- Worldly, **experienced**
- Sophisticated
- Educated
- Bent on making a place for himself in civilization

- Youthful
- Intuitive
- May or may not be **educated** - not important
- Follows his principles, not the laws
- At odds with **society**

Characteristics of Romanticism

- **The importance of Nature/Rejection of Urban Life**
 - The natural world = source of beauty and truth
 - Artists sought to capture the drama of natural forms - whether serene and peaceful or twisted and grotesque
- **Emphasis on the Individual Self**
 - An individual human is an entire universe
 - The idea that art should be a form of self-expression first took shape in this era.
 - The way to find universal truths is to express what is within, rather than conform to the outside world of society (Romantic heroes!)

Characteristics of Romanticism

- **The importance of intuition/imagination/emotion**
 - Rather than using knowledge, facts, and reason like the Rationalists, Romantics thought emotions, intuition, and imagination were the keys to a deeper understanding of the world.
- **An interest in the exotic/fantastic**
 - Romantics loved to hear about faraway lands and times, the supernatural, the mysterious. This could take the form of frontier adventure tales (cowboys and explorers!), or could be creepy horror stories.
Whether heroic or horrifying, Romantics thought fantastic tales suggested universal truths about the human heart.

Characteristics of Romanticism

- **Celebration of the common man/rural life/children**
 - Romantics also showed a new interest in the common people, rural life, and children.
 - The genuine voice of ordinary people was held to be more authentic than the sophisticated tone of writing and art from the Age of Enlightenment.
 - Children were prized for their innocence and their freedom from the corrupting influence of society.
- **Reform, Rebellion, Revolution**
 - Romantics' goal was to question society!
 - Writers and artists sought to influence the issues of slavery, women's rights, and labor.
 - Romantics were also reformers in their art, seeking new forms of poetry and storytelling, and rejecting the need to follow the examples of earlier masters.